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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

REPRESENTING RESISTANCE: FEMINIST DYSTOPIA AND THE REVOLTING BODY

BY

© DEBORAH WILLS

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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". . . we know the complex mediations and daily negotiations
required of women who will not abide in silence."

Teresa de Lauretis

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Representing Resistance: Feminist Dystopia and the Revolting Body" submitted by Deborah Wills in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Charlotte Bourke Wills, who could make any room a utopia by being in it.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the possibilities and impossibilities of resistance elaborated within twentieth-century feminist dystopian narrative. It argues that these texts consistently, although to differing degrees, deflate and undermine the viability of strategies of insurgence, even while representing cultures which demand such strategies.

The introductory chapter calls for a new theorization of utopianism that distinguishes utopian writing by women from that by men. The subtext of the feminist utopia, this chapter asserts, is dystopia, because the utopian moment is necessarily, for women, tenuous, embattled, and contingent. The relationship between feminist utopian and feminist dystopian writing therefore needs to be reexamined. Chapter Two argues that within the dystopian taxonomy, as illustrated in such speculative dystopias as Margaret Atwood's _The Handmaid's Tale_, Katharine Burdekin's _Swastika Night_, and Suzy McKee Charnas' _Walk to the End of the World_, the body is possessed, commodified, and marked by dystopian culture. The proliferation of ritual scarification, tattooing, branding, and other forms of literal inscription upon subaltern flesh suggests that resistance is a double-edged project: it strikes outward against phallic power yet can rebound painfully, if not fatally, upon dissident flesh. Chapter Three examines Joanna Russ' _The Female Man_ and Sheri S. Tepper's _The Gate to Women's Country_, in which resistance is not utterly disallowed, as in the novels examined in the

previous chapter, but is represented as possible only in a compromised and compromising form. Chapter Four explores two novels by linguist Suzette Haden Elgin that present language as a tool for resistance that is simultaneously redemptive of and transcendent of the body. The rehabilitated body outlined or adumbrated in Native Tongue and The Judas Rose, however, never fully emerges, suggesting the difficulty of freeing even the hopefully resistant body from the phallic economy. Finally, the conclusion argues for a reading of these novels as generative of another kind of resistance: the resistance experienced by the continually frustrated reader of the dystopia who seeks for a resistance that is, within the text, inevitably undermined, qualified, or disallowed.

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Chapter I
Dystopia and its Discontents: An Introduction

i. Representing Utopia

"Insofar as a basic premise is at any time shown or declared to be untrue, or only partly true, or not true in the sense earlier accepted, a whole edifice collapses, an abyss remains: the real, which must quickly be filled with new idols, readjusted significance."

Christine Brooke-Rose

"The utopian impulse cuts deep. Often it cuts against the grain, a bulldozer of metaphor and mesmerization, scarring the given landscape, plowing up the old to make way for the new. Maybe. Sometimes, however, the scarring of the landscape does not create the fertile ground for newer, gentler, more beautiful crops than ever grew before but remains a wound, an incision that never heals, one that bleeds endlessly."

Jean Bethke Elshtain

"Since these reflections are taking shape in an area just on the point of being discovered, they necessarily bear the mark of our time--a time during which the new breaks away from the old, and, more precisely, the (feminine) new from the old (*la nouvelle de l'ancien*). Thus, as there are no grounds for establishing a discourse, but rather an arid millennial ground to break, what I say has at least two sides and two aims: to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project."

Hélène Cixous

These fragments have been plundered from three very different texts, concerned in very different ways with the speculative. In *The Rhetoric of the Unreal*, Christine Brooke-Rose attempts to account for the "return of the fantastic in all its forms" as a manifestation of the contemporary cultural re-alignment of the real and the unreal (7); if, she argues, "what used to be called empirical reality, or the world, seems to have become more and more unreal," then it is "natural to turn to the 'unreal' as real: the two propositions are interrelated" (4). Jean Bethke Elshtain, in her "Response" to the studies of utopia in Women, Utopia, and Narrative, expresses her wariness over what she perceives as the very real consequences of a devastating kind of utopian imagining which eradicates entirely the "given landscape" (201) and risks becoming stranded in the sterile zone of an "unchecked interiority" (206). Hélène Cixous, in "The Laugh of the Medusa," acknowledges that aspect of the imaginative or speculative which Elshtain sees as destructive, but reads such ruin not merely as necessary but as celebratory, a breaking free as well as a breaking up, an obligatory harrowing of the landscape before an anticipatory seeding.

What unites these epigraphs, and provides a starting point for my discussion, is their provocative, paradiscursive use of a common metaphor. In a chapter that purports to concern itself with the representation of utopia, the trope is, perhaps, startling. The image is that of a razed and excoriated landscape, littered with the rubble of fallen edifices, riven with gaping unfathomable holes that bleed as eternally as stigmata, and as obscurely: a landscape layered with the tenuous architectures of the real, yet cataclysed by the unreal. Each of these three passages portends a cultural and a textual terrain harrowed, but not necessarily cultivated, by the speculative imagination. Elshtain's cryptically apocalyptic vision, in particular, seems to be a warning to the utopist as much as to the utopographer: when the map of utopia is superimposed upon the landscape of the real, something is bound to give.

Brooke-Rose is writing, in The Rhetoric of the Unreal, as much about the power of cultural "meaning-making machines" to fill up and fill in gaps in the real as about the power of the speculative imagination to cause such fissures (6). Disruptive tendencies can be generated, as Robert Scholes observes, through an awareness "of the universe as a system of systems, a structure of structures" (54); however, as long as a culture can fill in its own blanks proficiently enough, erecting new structures to take the place of the fallen, this potentially subversive awareness need never develop. I suspect that the task of utopian writing, therefore, and perhaps of all speculative writing, is to cause the proliferation of holes in the cultural terrain, to fire blanks into the seamless cohesion of communal mythologies, to mine the field of consensual reality. Perhaps it is the cataclysmic nature of this task that leads from the idea of utopian speculation to the idea, so graphically represented in my choice of epigraphs, of spoliation.

If this radical and ravaging production of holes is the essential mandate of the utopian text, it is ironic that critics of utopian writing, and in particular of feminist utopian writing, tend to see the genre as one which closes down, rather than opens up possibilities, as a genre not multilithic but monolithic. At best, utopianism is frequently dismissed as harmless but ineffectual. Even Ernst Bloch, a critic sympathetic to utopias, perpetuates such a judgement in the distinction he draws between "abstract" and "concrete" utopian thinking. "Abstract utopias," a category in which Bloch includes most literary utopias, never move beyond fantasy and wish-fulfilment, while "concrete utopias" offer a programmatic blueprint for generalized and realizable social reform.[1] This is not, it seems to me, a particularly useful distinction; I find it, in fact, misleading, since all utopias, not just those Bloch would label "abstract," presumably begin in desire and wish-fulfilment, just as all utopias, and not just those Bloch would call "concrete," imply a moral vision that is the basis of a critique of present society.

For Bloch, the category of "abstract utopias" simply absorbs the brunt of the criticism often directed towards utopian writing in general, that such texts offer "mere distraction and voyeuristic palliation" (Philosophy 87). This criticism is explicit, for example, in Raymond Williams' claim in "Utopia and Science Fiction" that any utopia that is not prescriptive and programmatic is merely "sentimental" (208-9). By offering an unreachable but irresistible paradise, such critics claim, utopianism promotes complacent endurance rather than change, and dissipates revolutionary energy in empty fantasy. The rhetoric of utopia, such an argument contends, thus lends itself to co-optation by the very oppressive or hegemonic powers it might otherwise contest, and shifts to a representation of utopia as the celestial reward waiting as a distant compensation for a lifetime's stoic terrestrial endurance.

Fredric Jameson challenges this view in his defence of utopian writing. In Marxism and Form, he revises Bloch's privileging of the concrete over the abstract. It is "practical thinking," Jameson asserts, which "everywhere represents a capitulation to the system" and which "stands as a testimony to the power of that system to transform even its adversaries into its own mirror image." In contrast, the "utopian idea," with its dialectical reversals, keeps alive "the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negative of all that is" (110-11). In Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, however, Jameson argues that, just as utopian thinking can undermine an uncritical capitulation to the status quo, utopian thinking is itself undermined by twentieth-century postmodernity, because postmodernity, with its emphasis on the fragmentation and contingency of all experience, problematizes any conception of a utopian future. Ruth Levitas counters Jameson's argument in "The Future of

Thinking about the Future," asserting that "the claim that postmodernism and/or postmodernity have extinguished the utopian imagination is not altogether true" (258). Utopia is "not dead," Levitas argues, but it is, "in a political sense, weakened," because it has retreated from its "function of catalysing social change" to the "more limited (though still vitally necessary)" functions of "estrangement, critique, and escapism" (262). Part of this "escapism" may lie, Levitas implies, in a naive optimism about what utopia can accomplish in the world outside the text. The mere existence of a utopian narrative does nothing to guarantee change. Indeed, Levitas reads Tom Moylan's assertion, in Demand the Impossible, that because utopian writing is still capable of generating estrangement, it is still capable of generating change, as "itself a utopian statement," since it arises ostensibly "from the wish that this may be so" (262). Even the potential strengths of contemporary feminist utopian writing, such as its commitment to self-criticism and collective questioning, while they "disarm criticisms of utopia as static, perfect, and totalitarian" (Levitas 260-61), can also be read as weakness. "The transformed form of utopia," Levitas argues, speaking of the postmodernist technical strategies frequently found in contemporary feminist texts, "can be seen as a manifestation of the postmodern condition itself," which abandons

> a grand narrative linking present with future and

> affirming a clear set of values, and in its place [posits] a fragmentary, ambiguous utopia which acts as an inconclusive critique of the present, while not confidently asserting that there is a real possibility of anything better. Moreover, even where they are located in the future, such utopias are, like most utopian or intentional communities which have been set up within history, what may be called interstitial utopias. That is, they occupy the spaces allowed to them by other, dominant groups in their own time. In Raymond Williams's terms, they are predominantly alternative rather than oppositional, and can be tolerated while only partially co-opted by the dominant culture. (261)

The "alternative" utopia, according to this reading, contains despite itself an element of the conservative or anti-revolutionary, since it co-exists, if it does not actually co-operate, with the dominant culture. Theorists as diverse as Friedrich Engels, George Kateb and Gregory Benford have variously asserted that utopian writing diverts attention from reality to fantasy and sublimates political energy. Benford, in his attack on late twentieth-century utopias, calls such texts "reactionary," because they "recall the past, often in its worst aspects," and "regressive," because they seek "to turn back the tide of Western thought" (11). Such utopias, Benford asserts, "violate our innate sense of human progress"; they "don't look like the future; they resemble a warped, malignant form of the past" (11).

Since, among other lapses, Benford never pauses to examine who the consensual "we" who apparently agree on what "our" "innate" sense of "human progress" might be (Benford's "we" certainly doesn't include me), I do not feel constrained to take his attack on the "reactionary utopia" overly seriously. Raymond Williams' criticism, however, merits more careful attention. The problems raised in considering what Williams, in Problems in Materialism and Culture, calls the "alternative utopia" are grounded, to my mind, in complex questions of separatism and centrality.[2] Critics who have studied communities of women, such as Nina Auerbach and Marlene Barr, wrestle with the double-edged nature of separation. The hermeticism that defines such communities, for example, can be read either as protection or as imprisonment. Moreover, such groups often exist, as Williams points out, only by sanction of the surrounding culture. I use the word "surrounding" deliberately, since frequently utopian feminist communities are fictionally represented as enclosed and enveloped by a larger, more powerful, and hostile dystopian culture which presses perpetually against their permeable borders.

The specifically feminist utopia is, I would argue, consistently "alternative" in this sense; it exists interstitially amidst a larger culture that is not only dominant but actively hostile, actively attempting to destroy or colonize the utopian community. The feminist utopia occupies a liminal space and a liminal time, and even single-sex communities are not immune from this process of invasion and incursion. In The Female Man, for example, Joanna Russ's utopian Whileaway occupies only one strand of many intertwining possible futures: while Whileaway itself is, on that strand of Whileaway's "present," on the cusp of change because it is newly in contact with other possible worlds and times, the very existence of these other strands on the braid of possibility speaks to the provisionality and contingency of Whileaway's existence.

Beyond the question of the tentative and embattled existence of the separatist community lies the equally difficult question of strategies of self-marginalization. Female utopian communities may be marginalized deliberately, as in Sally Miller Gearhart's The Wanderground, in which the Hill Women have set up wilderness colonies beyond the male-dominated cities, or accidentally, as in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland, in which men have mysteriously died of a viral plague that leaves, generations later, a village of parthenogenic women who eagerly anticipate the day when men will be reintegrated into their society. Whether circumstantial or deliberate, however, their marginalization remains problematic. If it is a radical act to usurp the outopian no-place for women, as well as the eutopian good-place, it is also potentially a dangerous one. "The feminist utopia," as Jean Pfaelzer notes, "resides outside of patriarchal history. But in some sense women already are conceived of and hence conceive themselves as outside of history" ("Avant Garde" 284). Thus, while separatist feminist utopias may "add a layer to the traditional reading of utopia," they also reproduce a marginality which already exists (284). The question, as Pfaelzer phrases it, is:

> in literalizing women's marginality, do [separatist utopias] perpetuate it or subvert it? Is the "nowhere," the non-place, a necessary space for women to be in? To what degree does the separateness of the feminist utopia reinscribe women's "otherness" in its attempt to subvert and criticize it? ("Avant Garde" 284)

In order to ensure its survival, the feminist utopia must marginalize itself, placing itself on the borders of space and time, and yet somehow must manage to be, there, neither ghetto nor prison. And if utopia only exists in a marginal position, can it in fact effect change, or is the illusion of change, the sense of spurious safety generated by distance, part of the symptomatic debilitation and dissolution of utopia?

There is a second strain of criticism directed against utopian writing in general which goes beyond this debate over whether utopia is inherently revolutionary or conservative, whether it challenges or reinstates the status quo. At worst, utopian writing is accused of being not merely placatory, deceptive, and grounded in desire rather than in the will to change, but also of being intrinsically fascist and totalitarian. "Utopia and terror," writes Jean Bethke Elshtain, "are too closely connected for anyone to take easy comfort" (202). And it has become something of a truism that part of the nature of utopia is that, as John Crowley claims of Thomas More's genre-eponymous Utopia, "nobody really wants to live there" (8). Arthur O. Lewis begins his discussion of the anti-utopian novel with the assertion that "Utopia, once ardently sought after, has, especially in recent years, become a thing to avoid, the more so as it becomes more immediately possible" (27).[3]

Robert C. Elliott addresses this distrust of utopia in The Shape of Utopia. He argues that the oppressively static perfection of the totalitarian utopia is what makes the utopia of the "Grand Inquisitor" uninhabitable. The Grand Inquisitor's utopia is, Elliott claims, the "product of 'the euclidean mind' . . . which is obsessed by the idea of regulating all life by reason and bringing happiness to man whatever the cost" (Elliott 100). This "utopia" is based on a rigidly defined and rigidly enforced idea of human progress as rational and linear (hence "euclidean"). The Grand Inquisitor offers a choice only among binary opposites; he offers, as Elliott states in his quotation from Yevgeny Zamyatin's We, "happiness without freedom, or freedom without happiness" (qtd. in Elliott 94). Ursula K. Le Guin, elaborating upon Elliott's ideas in "A Non-Euclidean View of

California as a Cold Place to Be," argues that the "purer, the more euclidean the reason that builds a utopia, the greater its self-destructive capacity" (87). We need to build utopia on something other, Le Guin argues, than the worship of reason and linear progression, because utopia can never again be achieved "by going forward, but only roundabout or sideways" (98). Elliott suggests much the same thing when he states, employing a similar topographical trope to the one that Brooke-Rose, Elshtain, and Cixous use, that "if the word [utopia] is to be redeemed, it will have to be by someone who has followed utopia into the abyss which yawns behind the Grand Inquisitor's vision, and who then has clambered out on the other side" (100).

While Elliott implies that the abyss must be entered in order to climb out the other side, Elshtain does not. Her apocalyptic vision of a landscape scarred with bloody unhealed wounds is informed by her reading of utopianism as a devolutionary impulse that eradicates "a multiplicity of moral claims and competing visions of what an ideal way of life ought to be" (203). Beginning with The Republic, in which Plato portrays "every difference" as "a threat portending disintegration . . . every distinction a possible blemish on the canvas of harmonious and unsullied order" (202), Elshtain sweeps forward through utopian literary history to recent feminist utopists whose "visions of planets populated solely by lesbian separatists" must be "disturbing not only to hidebound 'patriarchs' but to anyone concerned with how we might create a more generous, inclusive vision of the human community" (203). For "feminists," Elshtain admonishes, "are no more exempt than any other creator of texts or author of contexts from the arrogantly fantastic, from hoping to implement a world in which the Other (no longer Jews but men, in many instances) has been eliminated" (203).

Leaving aside the question of the elimination of the (male) Other, to which I will return, I cannot help wondering with which feminist utopists, in particular, Elshtain is concerned. Her article refers directly to only one utopian text, Ursula K. Le Guin's Always Coming Home, in which the lesbian separatists, if present, are extremely well-camouflaged. Indeed, Always Coming Home is cited approvingly for its protagonist Pandora's indictment of "smartass utopians" who are, Pandora says, "always so much healthier and saner and sounder and kinder and tougher and righter than [she] and [her] family and friends" (qtd. in Elshtain 204). In other respects, Always Coming Home is an unfortunate choice for Elshtain, since the novel's extraordinary textual commitment to the fragmentary, the multiplicitous, and the multivocal (which includes the availability of an audio cassette of the songs and oral histories printed in the text), undermines Elshtain's claims concerning the totalizing and singular nature of the utopian. Elshtain sees the utopian impulse as an attenuating force that leaves a community thin, bland, and homogenous; she echoes Pandora's claim that "smartass utopians," like all "people who have the answers," are "boring . . . boring . . . boring" in her own warning against the "sort of feminist utopian [who] wants a smoothly functioning order--no dirty spots on the canvas, all is wholeness, niceness, ho-hum" (204).

Elshtain levels these accusations generally and generically. A consideration of specific novels, however, undermines Elshtain's critique, since these novels suffer, in my reading, from anything but a cloying wholeness, smoothness, or niceness. Marge Piercy's Woman on the Edge of Time, for example, portrays a society in which a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds have been carefully preserved, both in genetic planning and in the varied ethnic "flavours" of the individual communities, so that any tendency to homogenization into a bland white unity is deliberately limited. Monique Wittig's Les Guérillères allows its triumphant women warriors to invite the young men, those capable of learning and adapting to new social constellations, to join their newly-reconstituted social circles. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland and James Tiptree Jr.'s "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" show male explorers welcomed into all-female worlds until the men's violence makes their assimilation impossible. None of these texts, among the most well-known and often-cited of the feminist utopian genre, supports Elshtain's admonitory claim that the feminist utopian impulse is a totalizing one.

Even in those worlds that are the purview of Elshtain's dreaded "lesbian separatists," such as Joanna Russ's Whileaway,[4] the utopian text makes clear that the treasured richness and multiplicity of the utopian civilization can only develop and flourish away from the colonizing drive of Terran patriarchy. After all, a culture like Whileaway's, which represents God as "a jumble of badly-matching planes, a mass of inhuman contradictions . . . a constantly changing contradiction" (103), can hardly be fairly accused of eradicating a "multiplicity of moral claims" (Elshtain 203). Even the dance form of Whileaway, we are told, says "not 'I Am' or "I Will' but 'I Guess'" (102).

Whileaway has frequently and, I think, unfairly been accused of totalitarianism. Often this accusation is based on Security and Peace officer Janet Evason's official execution of the "individualist" woman who leaves her work and community to run away into the hills. Annette Keinhorst, in "Emancipatory Projection," argues that Whileaway deliberately and brutally excludes diversity by excluding non-conforming individuals (94-95). But the question of who is excluding who is a complex one. It is true that the runaway woman is, after rejecting the proffered chance of reconciliation with the community, killed. However, she has, before running away, first denied the existence of all the people in the community. Her crime is not one of individualism but of solipsism: the note the woman leaves behind says to everyone else, "_you do_ not exist" (143). On Whileaway, it is not necessarily a capital crime, as Marlene Barr and Keinhorst imply, to be different or to be an individual; the planet is inhabited by many memorable individuals, Janet Evason herself not least among them. It is, however, a crime to refuse others their existence, as the fugitive does in her note. The whole incident is, inescapably, troubling and anomalous, and perhaps that is why Russ included it. In the end, however disconcerting, it at least provides yet another of Russ's textual blows to the idea of the feminist utopia as pleasant and boring.

Whileaway in particular, and feminist utopias in general, have likewise been censured for their supposed erasure or oppression of the individual in favour of the community as a whole. Keinhorst argues that "the strong minority consciousness" of the utopian society is purchased at the cost of the fear or exclusion of "powerful individuals who possess a slightly divergent understanding of liberation" (94). Similarly, in "Immortal Feminist Communities of Women: A Recent Idea in Science Fiction," Marlene Barr is sympathetic to the idea of a feminist community, yet feels unease at what seems the inevitable loss of self to community. Barr contends it is ironic that

> although the immortal feminist communities of all these novels give women the dignity and opportunity that reality denies them, their individual characteristics are

> lost. There is little difference between Martha and Ariadne and Leah; one particular Riding Woman is really not that much more memorable than her counterparts; the _Gloria_'s crew is rather forgettable; Jael's appearance seems to be a coda to Russ's novel. Auerbach calls this submerging of the individual in literature's women's communities "the death of the real people we used to read novels to meet." (46)

I find it difficult to accept this assessment. The examples Barr supplies, in my reading, undermine rather than support her argument. Jael's appearance, for example, though it is indeed strategically delayed in _The Female Man_, is constantly prefigured and foreshadowed in Russ's text; readers are continually urged to be on the lookout for the advent of the yet-unmet fourth narrator, the "woman with no Brand Name" (157). Far from being merely, as Barr claims, a "coda" to the novel, Jael's presence is the narrative consciousness that most dynamically guides the other narrative selves and that most forcefully controls events and manipulates circumstances. The crew of the _Gloria_, in Tiptree's "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?", is only "rather forgettable" to a reader uninterested in what women who have lived their entire life in a gynocratric culture might be like. The crew, moreover, far from being indistinguishable, ranges from the talkative twins who, with their incessant chattering, unintentionally unfold the truth of their society to the narrator, to Lady Blue, the reticent and dignified captain, to the androgynous "Andy," who is taken for a boy by the male narrator. Neither are the Riding Women in Suzy McKee Charnas's Motherlines as essentially interchangeable as Barr implies; the nurturing, caring, maternal welcome extended to the escaped Alldera when she arrives at the Riding Women's camp at the outset of Motherlines is soon revealed as only one aspect of a camp culture so complex and non-stereotypical that it includes grudges, duels, war-games with neighbouring groups, and struggles for inter- and intra-tribal power. This is hardly the ho-hum homogeneity hinted at by Barr and Elshtain. In my reading of this text, the universal never drowns out the particularities of these multifaceted, contentious, and sometimes troubled women; they are women as well as Women.

The fear that utopia, especially feminist utopia, is dangerously totalizing therefore seems to me to be exaggerated, if not ungrounded. It is the frequency with which such criticisms are levelled at the feminist utopia that I find particularly provocative. What seems to be behind such anxieties is a fear of who will and who will not be allowed into utopia. After all, everyone knows that Plato exiled the poets from his Republic, as critics of this school never fail to remind us. In the separatist or single-sex utopia, male critics especially are faced with the additional difficulty of situating themselves as readers of a text in which they have, literally, no place. Peter Fitting spends a great deal of time addressing this in several articles in which he becomes an apologist, to the male reader, on behalf of the separatist utopia. Such a stance is encoded, for example, into the title of the article he published in Women's Studies called "For Men Only: A Guide to Reading Single-Sex Worlds." In what must have been an ironic gesture, the editors of the journal called their headline for the article "Reading Feminist Utopias: Who Needs Men?" The tension between title and headline reflects, I think, a very real tension for the male reader who must experience the fictional representation of the separatist utopia as a place from which he is exiled, who experiences the kind of readerly dislocation of subjectivity which is familiar territory to the female reader but surely newer ground to the male. I sympathize, therefore, with Fitting's efforts to re-place himself and to attempt to allow his ("men only") readers to do the same. Unfortunately, this re-placement seems to be largely an effort to reestablish the male reader at the centre of the separatist text, an effort that dilutes any salutary vertigo that the dislocating reading experience might offer. Fitting speaks repeatedly, for example, of the "implied male reader" as if there must, even in a separatist text, always be one. This assumption gives, perhaps, too much weight to the implied male reader. We must, Fitting writes in "For Men Only, "acknowledge the apparent exclusion of men from these exemplary worlds," and "examine the effect of this exclusion on a male reader" (101).

The import of the actual banishment of men from the utopia is also diluted; Fitting reassures his readers repeatedly that their exile is only "apparent." His conviction on this point is such that he repeats this point verbatim three times in "For Men Only," and repeats it as well in his articles "So We All Became Mothers: New Roles for Men in Recent Utopian Fiction" and "Reconsiderations of the Separatist Paradigm in Recent Feminist Science Fiction." "It is not men," Fitting asserts, "who have been excluded from these visions of an alternate [sic] human future, but male values and male roles" ("Men Only" 103). To which an anonymous reader has pencilled in the margin, "well, actually, it is men. . ."

Fitting's conviction that the absence of men in these texts is "not a call for a world without men" but "a metaphor" ("Men Only" 102) speaks to the difficulties of even an overtly exclusionary text in radically disrupting readerly hierarchies and restructuring readerly subjectivity. While the literalness of men's absence is not particularly at issue here, the privileging of the reading experience of the (implied) male reader is. Fitting asserts in "So We All Became Mothers" that feminist utopian texts are important because "they give to me, as a man, an experience, however limited, of what an end to sexual hierarchy and domination would imply in the concrete reality of my everyday life" (177). And, while Fitting's critical undertaking shows his willingness seriously to engage with and respond to these texts, to read them and think about them conscientiously, his insistence on reinserting men into the separatist utopia and on judging the value and social relevance of these texts in terms of what they offer the male reader coexists uneasily with the good faith and good intentions with which he no doubt approaches his investigations.

However, it is clear that Fitting's particular textual anxieties are representative of those of many critics, women as well as men. These concerns about exclusivity and inclusivity are not neatly polarized along lines of gender. I suspect that such concerns are what fuel the persistence of the critical vision of utopia as colonizing and annihilating. As in the trope of the razed and excoriated landscape, utopia is seen as a force which must wipe out the old in order to cultivate the new. This impulse, which Bloch sees as the irresistible upward pull of human civilization, and which John Crowley sees as the implacable urge for global reform, is represented by critics such as Elshtain as inexorable and therefore terrifying. I think the question might be phrased like this: what ground will utopia occupy, and what will it supplant? The space inhabited by utopia is inevitably a problematic space. Because utopia, like women's experience, exists in what Julia Kristeva describes as the "not now" and the "not yet" (Polylogue 519), the "utopian moment," as Tom Moylan writes, "can never be directly articulated, for it does not yet exist. It must always speak in figures and call out structurally for completion and exegesis in theory and practice" (23).

However, these "figures," which Moylan, echoing Bloch's language, calls "figures of hope" (21), have, Louis Marin insists, little to do with hope. In Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces, Marin allies utopia not with the hopefully prophetic but with the prophetically "neutral." Utopia is, Marin claims, that which prevents, by its own nature, its realization. Utopia "does not have its foundation in hope," Marin insists, because "included in its functioning is the notion of not indicating the means for its construction" (274). Marin's "not indicating" refers, I think, not to a failure, but to a refusal on the part of utopia to encompass the possibility of its own reification.

This central contradiction of utopia is implicit in its name. It is a truism among critics of utopian writing that the word utopia contains and embraces its own contradictory (dis)placement: it is the "good place" that can only be "no place." Utopia is an exile of time and space; it is, as Marin observes, temporally nowhere: "Utopia is not tomorrow in time. It is nowhere, neither tomorrow nor yesterday" (274). Utopia is also spatially nowhere, the ou-topos, the literal no-place which must always be situated otherwise and elsewhere, in a realm of geographical Otherness, separated from the topoi of the known by the prophylaxes of physical barriers, or by sheer unnavigable, impassable tracts of distance. Like the early speculative genre known as the "Voyage to the Moon," in which the culture of Earth is critiqued from a celestial distance,[5] utopia is, if not literally then metaphorically, out of this world.[6]

Utopian writing could thus be read as a genre of arousal or even of titillation, a genre in which the aims of critique and exposure are always accompanied by a kind of textual teasing, a flaunting of the inaccessibility of the desired. It is in this sense the utopia tends to carry "colloquially," as Levitas observes, "the double sense of perfection and impossibility" (257). And, if desire is comprised at least in part by the inaccessibility of what is desired, then that very impossibility is what heightens and refines utopian desire.

This version of desire, however, complicates the argument that utopia, by proffering a seductive future, catalyses action though aspiration. Levitas' claim for "the political importance of utopia" rests largely on the argument, which she investigates perceptively in "The Future of Thinking About the Future," that "a vision of a good society located in the future may act as an agent of change" (257). Or, as J. Max Patrick admonishes in "Inside Utopia," a critic of utopia should never forget the dictum of Professor A.S.P. Woodhouse that "iconoclasm is the complement of utopianism" (23). Marin challenges this; utopia, he insists, is not a political project and can never be an agent of social change (276).

Marin's critique of utopianism is complex; while utopia does function as an "ideological critique of the dominant ideology" because "utopic practice" unconsciously schematizes, "by the spatial play of its internal difficulties (incongruities), the empty places (topoi) of the concepts social theory will eventually occupy" (xiv), the role of utopia is nevertheless ultimately and only interstitial. It exists between and among boundaries, real and imaginary, and therefore cannot map out a future. Utopic discourse therefore occupies the space which Marin calls the "empty" or "neutral" (xiii).

The textual "play" upon which utopia is dependent thus begins in its self-signification. Its implicit negation, according to Marin,

> is an integral part of the word "u-topia." It therefore has no negative function because it comes before judgement or even a position one might take. Does it not set up, inside the nominal signifier, neither before nor after affirmation or negation but between them, a space and distance prohibiting them from terminating the possible paths of truth? Neither yes nor no, true nor false, opening within discourse a space discourse cannot receive.[7] (7)

What Marin does not consider is how differently a gendered "no-place" might be shaped. Critics of traditional utopias generally overlook such a question; it might even be possible to argue that feminist fictions of utopia and anti-utopia have been written at least in part in order to force the neglected question of gender into the critical debate on utopia. Northrop Frye concludes his "Varieties of Literary Utopias" with questions of spatiality similar to those which intrigue Marin, but, as with Marin, gender finds neither space nor place in Frye's discussion. "It is clear," Frye asserts, "that if there is to be any revival of utopian imagination in the near future, it cannot return to the old-style spatial utopias" (48-49). New utopias must instead

> derive their form from the shifting and dissolving movement of society that is gradually replacing the fixed locations of life. . . . A fixed location in space is "there," and "there" is the only answer to the spatial question "where?" Utopia, in fact and in etymology, is not a place; and when the society it seeks to transcend is everywhere, it can only fit into what is left, the invisible non-spatial point in the center of space. The question "Where is utopia?" is the same as the question "Where is nowhere?" and the only answer to that question is "here." (49)

The question Frye raises is concerned, it seems to me, with the narrative possibilities of space. But how do these possibilities present themselves to narrators of feminist utopian spaces? "Women's space" is, as Pfaelzer points out, "the gap, the rupture, the enclosure, the absence of female inscription in discourse and history," while utopian space is "no place, the inversion, the hole in history which signifies and allows for the fantasy and the wish" ("Avant Garde" 282). Both feminist discourse theorists and utopists, Pfaelzer observes, "deconstruct material space in order to portray what has not happened, what has not happened yet, what might happen" (282). Like the "subjunctivity" that, for Samuel R. Delany and Joanna Russ, defines speculative writing, the utopian space is one in which there is room for that which has not yet happened.[8] But the social "shifting and dissolving" of which Frye speaks is distinct from the textual lack of fixity which both the speculative and the utopian text deliberately engineer. In such a text the reader, "displaced from the central position of the knowledgeable observer . . . stands on constantly shifting ground, on the margins of understanding, at the periphery of vision," from whence arises, as Teresa de Lauretis notes, "the sense of wAnder [sic], of being dislocated to another spacetime continuum where human possibilities are discovered in the intersections of other signs with other meanings" ("Signs" 165-66).

This space which can exist neither within nor without discourse is paradigmatic of what Marin calls "the problem of utopia" (279). If utopia is, as Marin argues, that which obscures both its own realization and its own representation, the question becomes not just "where does utopia exist" but, more problematically, "where can utopia exist?" Further, how can a utopia which can exist in no discursive space be represented? What would or could such a no-place look like? More specifically, what could such a place look like for the designer of a feminist utopia? The problem shapes itself, in my mind, graphically: imagine, for example, writing the word "UTOPIA" on a placard. Write it backwards. Now, hold it up to a mirror. Where does the word exist? This, it seems to me, is the dilemma of utopia and its representations.

How does the feminist utopist create a utopia that is unrepresentable, because there is no place for it, yet which must be textually represented? My answer, which I will elaborate in the following section, "Representing Dystopia," is that the feminist utopist must reconfigure the genre of utopia and, in so doing, defy its most cherished and characteristic generic conventions. The act of appropriating the utopian genre is itself a revolutionary act, but it is the ways in which such a text subverts convention that these utopias truly resist generic pressures and generate a distinctive feminist utopian space that merges the utopian and the dystopian. The resistance of the feminist utopian text against representing the utopian space as, for women, "purely" utopian thus becomes its most heroic and most oppositional exploit.

ii. Representing Dystopia

"Thinking the not-yet is of particular importance to feminists, as it is here that freedom and necessity meet."

Frances Bartkowski

"The fin is coming a little early this siècle."

Angela Carter

The critical debate surrounding utopia centres on two issues: first, on whether the genre is emancipatory or restrictive, open or closed, epistemological or ontological; second, on whether or not the existence of the genre depends upon utopia's unrepresentability, or at least its unreproduceability. Jean Pfaelzer conflates the questions as follows:

> To what degree is the retreat from a totalized or absolute representation of the future [in utopian writing] a democratizing and antipatriarchal act, encouraging the reader to participate in the creation of alternative possible worlds . . . and to what degree does it represent [as Jameson argues in "Progress Versus Utopia"] our "incapacity to imagine utopia?" ("History" 193)

The debate pertaining to dystopian narrative, neither as extensive, as formalized, nor as dialectical as that pertaining to the utopian, occupies a somewhat different critical ground. In theorizing dystopia, we must first scrutinize the relationship between the utopian and the dystopian. If the utopian narrative represents an aspiration towards paradise, does the dystopian narrative represent a Fall from grace, a deliberate rejection of the salvific that carries within itself the seeds of its own damnation? Peter Fitting, who writes prolifically on the subject, would say yes. The titles Fitting has chosen for his work on the subject, titles such as "The Decline of the Feminist Utopian Novel" and "The Turn from Utopia in Recent Feminist Fiction," illustrate this. While "Turn" implies something deliberate, and "Decline" suggests something less volitional, both titles, like the articles themselves, are permeated with a nostalgia for the lost utopian, and with an elegiac sense of dystopia as a falling away from the utopian ideal.

Fitting's work examines what he sees as a "retreat," in the 1980s, from the feminist utopian writing of the 1970s ("Turn" 141). In "The Turn from Utopia" he argues that "both utopias and dystopias have a performative function" that is intended "ideally to push the reader to action" (142). More recent dystopias such as The Handmaid's Tale, Suzette Haden Elgin's Native Tongue and The Judas Rose, and Zoë Fairbairn's Benefits have, however, failed in terms of what Fitting sees as both their "plausibility" and their "effectiveness" (142). His criticism is focused on the social impact of the dystopian vision; "what effects," he asks,

> do these more pessimistic works have on readers, particularly when compared to the utopian writing of the previous decade? What are the political strategies which are implicit in works which depict the future and the struggle of women in a pessimistic or cautionary way, as opposed to earlier visions of a future structured by feminist principles and ideals? More bluntly, what serves the building of a new society best? The evocation of images of a better future along with indications of how we get there? Or, at a time of increasing threats, does it make more sense to try to warn people that the battle is far from won? ("Decline" 19)

Although Fitting says that these questions are the "horns of [his] dilemma" ("Decline" 19), the overall tone of his writing leaves little doubt that he considers utopian writing to occupy the moral high ground over the merely monitory dystopian. Further, although he writes that it is "easy to equate the apparent decline in utopian writing with larger events" ("Decline" 19), Fitting really gives no serious consideration to the possible causes for what he perceives as the demoralized and demoralizing "retreat" from the utopian. Even his repeated use of the word "retreat" is, to me, extremely suggestive, with its apparently unintentional and overlapping echoes of the rhetoric of warfare, seige, sanctuary, and return.

Fitting's repeated use of the term, in fact, calls to mind Donna Young's 1978 anthropological fantasy Retreat: As It Was!. In this novel, a pre-patriarchal women's civilization is portrayed on the brink of its collapse; the forces invading the civilization cause the genetic mutation that creates males. The pacifist women of the besieged city, abandoning their long commitment to nonviolence, determine to defend themselves against the invaders. At the end of the novel the city is in ruins, and the survivors escape with the anomalous new male child in order eventually to establish, the text implies, the groundwork for the patriarchal civilization which history eventually inherits. Young's play with the resonances of the title's "retreat" is provocative and shrewd: the text retreats backwards in time and history; the survivors retreat from their city; the women retreat from their traditional stance of pacifism. Finally, the collapse of the women's city suggests a retreat from utopia, although not in the sense in which Fitting employs the phrase. For women, even utopia can never be a final retreat; it can never be, in the monastic or contemplative sense, a haven or sanctuary. As I will argue later, the feminist utopia is almost always portrayed as embattled and besieged; it is a space that is tenuous and provisional rather than a safe or hallowed retreat. For women in utopia, the utopian is always haunted by the dystopian.

Fitting is not alone in his implication that the movement away from utopian writing towards the dystopian represents a failure or decline. Claire Sponsler, for example, in an article perceptively chronicling the emergence of the cyberpunk model of the urban-apocalypse future, observes that cyberpunk appeared on the science fiction scene at a time when alternative visions of the future were suffering what could be called a generic debilitation, or what Joanna Russ has described as "the wearing down of genre materials" (qtd. in Kaveney 80).[9] Science fiction's tradition of the dystopian near-future, a recognizably iconographic image of the future as found in the work of writers such as John Brunner, Philip Dick, Cyril Kornbluth, and Frederik Pohl, began "to lose oppositional power, and hence effectiveness, as a critique of the present" once such "bleak, eco-dystopian" futures became, though their very proliferation, the "official" look of the future (Sponsler 252). At the same time, Sponsler argues, "the genre of (primarily feminist) utopian writing gradually dissolved in the 1980s, in part under the pressure of its own self-criticism" (252). The collapse or dissolution of the utopian space, in such a reading, leaves room only for the dystopian, while the debasement of utopia, or its inability to sustain itself, becomes a generic flaw.

Nicola Nixon also comments on this degeneration of utopianism and its descent into dystopia. She cites Fitting's conclusions approvingly and furthers them by arguing that the dystopias of the 1980s are in fact criticisms of both a naive utopianism and of feminism itself. Like Fitting, she categorizes The Handmaid's Tale, Benefits, Native Tongue, and The Judas Rose as a "series of monitory or cautionary texts" that are characterized by a "quasi-didactic (fictional) finger-shaking" (220). Although these texts are still as "political" as their earlier utopian counterparts, in that gender remains their locus of inquiry and critique, the subject of this critique has, Nixon believes, altered. Dystopias by Atwood, Fairbairns, Elgin and Pamela Sargent address not, she claims, the limitations of patriarchy, but of feminism. They are, Nixon asserts, "barely concealed allegories of feminism's complacency and failure" (220). Thus, while they may be as admonitory as earlier texts, Nixon argues, the subject of the admonition has been radically reconstituted.

In "Everything Not Forbidden is Compulsory," Janeen Webb constructs a similar theory for reading the contemporary dystopia. Webb supports her view with a detailed reading of The Handmaid's Tale, which she sees as an attack on "a disturbing complicity on the part of women" (21). To my eyes unjustifiably, Webb sees this complicity as grounded in the women's movement, which Webb reads not as a source of resistance but as a fatal tool in the hands of the Gileadan patriarchy. She states that

> both in the events that produced this mysogynist [sic] monotheocracy, and in its continued operation . . . .

> female complicity extends beyond groups easily identified as being opposed to feminism, so it is quite possible to read the text as a critique of potentially destructive elements within the feminist movement. (21)

Feminism has, Webb suggests, lent the Gilead regime its rhetorical tools: "the feminist movement, with its insistence on the rights of women to determine what happens to their bodies, and its anti-pornography stance, has provided many of the dogmatisms of the new regime" (21). Further, women's attempts to gain reproductive control, through birth control or abortion, have provided the "familiar slogans" that are Gilead's justification for its rigid control of women. The "feminist ideal of the 'wanted baby,'" says Webb, "has been thoroughly warped, but it is still there in the background--the difference lies in who does the wanting" (21-22).

But while feminism's fight against pornography may have been subsumed or co-opted by Gilead's patriarchy, it can hardly be held responsible, as Webb seems to hold it, for Gilead's repressive censorship. In fact, the ideologies at the heart of Gilead and of pornography are the same. Both rely on the myth of the complete availability of the female body for the use of men; Gilead's professed ideals of modesty merely attempt to disguise this fact by (literally) veiling it. Further, to suggest that, because feminism's struggle for reproductive freedom has supplied Gilead with a repressive rhetoric, feminism is somehow responsible for that repression is surely rather like holding feminism responsible for lung cancer because a tobacco company once appropriated the slogan "You've come a long way, Baby."

As further evidence supporting her reading of Atwood's text as a criticism of feminism, Webb proffers Offred's narrative observation, addressed to her mother, that "You wanted a women's culture. Well now there is one. It isn't what you meant, but it exists" (qtd.in Webb 21). Webb sees this statement as Offred's cry "against the part that the women's movement has played in its own downfall" (21). The fact is, however, that the two women characters in The Handmaid's Tale who we know were feminist activists prior to the inception of the new regime do not assimilate into the new system as Offred herself does. The first, Offred's mother, is literally ejected from the system by being deported to the colonies; the second, Moira, runs away until she is sent to the brothel as an "incorrigible." It is Offred who, always uneasy with her mother's feminism and rejecting her activism, must share in the responsibility for the complacent cultural climate which allowed Gilead to rise. The women who are portrayed as the most complicitous in the new regime--the Aunts, and Serena Joy, the Commander's wife--are polarized on the other end of the ideological spectrum, as far away from Moira's and Offred's mother's politics as it is possible to be. The fact that, in the face of this, Webb is still able to read the text as an indictment of feminism's complicity in oppression speaks to me of how easily female agency can be paralysed by fears of complicity, just as patriarchy's effortless co-optation of feminist tools for change speaks to me not of feminism's culpability but of its continued and unabated indispensability.

Fitting, Webb, and Nixon all cite The Handmaid's Tale as an example of a text that chronicles not just the collapse of utopianism but the failure of feminism itself. Nixon sees it as one of a series of generic allegories of feminist failure and complacency; Fitting condemns it as a text which is, itself, complacent, because it betrays a conservative satisfaction with "our" present. Fitting reads the "Historical Notes" that conclude the novel as undermining even the potential admonitory function of the text's representation of dystopia, since they are "meant to reassure the reader that Gilead will not survive and that North American society will return to something resembling the present" ("Decline" 18). However, Fitting asserts, "while the present may be good enough for Atwood, it is not good enough for me" (18). It seems to me, however, that there are no adequate grounds for Fitting's assertion that Atwood holds up "the present as 'better' than any other future" (18). The irony of the Historical Notes, an irony I will explore in greater detail in Chapter Two, is that they return us unsatisfied to the present, creating a cultural and temporal continuum of present/Gilead/future that indicts all three simultaneously.

It is true that Atwood does acknowledge, in an interview, a certain "guarded optimism" in the fact that Offred's "message in a bottle" does get through and that the possibility of escape does apparently exist (Rothstein C11). It exists, however, ambiguously: the indeterminacy of the novel's conclusion and its self-raised questions of authorship and authenticity complicate such possibilities considerably. Further, while a new society does exist beyond the fall of Gilead which is able to reflect on Gilead in the same way, Atwood remarks, that we reflect about the seventeenth century (Rothstein C11), when I think about the ways in which we generally do think about the seventeenth century, with self-satisfaction, ignorance, and a sense of infinite distance, I see no little irony in Atwood's statement. The Handmaid's Tale's post-Gilead future is not a complacent reassertion of a return to the values of a desirable present. The Handmaid's tale is instead, like the Knight's tale in Swastika Night, a possibly despairing statement that, for women, dystopia is a constant, its experience always only a matter of degree.

Dystopia is, as Fitting, Webb, and Nixon understand it, a vitiated version of utopia, its emancipatory potential leached and lost. Utopia's productive optimism, in this view, gives place to dystopian degenerescence. There is, however, another way of thinking about dystopia. John Crowley comes closer to my own thinking in his speculations upon the interrelationship of utopianism and millenarianism. The link between the two is, like the link between utopianism and dystopianism, undoubtedly complex. Crowley sees the two as interconnected: the millenarian impulse, or the sense that history is a nightmare from which we are all imminently about to awaken, and the utopian impulse are "both aspects of the same attempt" (10). As Crowley puts it, this tension is grounded in the opposing pull of the dystopian against the utopian impulse, an opposition based on the conflicting convictions that

> there is a possible civilization to be built, far better than the one we know, in which human beings can live fully, happily, and at peace; and, on the other hand, that the world which human beings have so far managed to make is hopeless, that it can't survive, that it is even now on its last legs and foundering. ([1])

Although Crowley is speaking here of millenarianism (the certainty that the end of the world is at hand, and about time, too) rather than dystopianism, his theorizing about the relationship between the two is equally fruitful for thinking about the relationship between utopia and dystopia. Like the tension between utopianism and millenarianism, the tension between utopia and dystopia arises at least in part from their proximity, which generates their opposing dialogic and dialectical pulls. The link between the two is intricate. In the margin of Frank E. Manuel's Utopia and Utopian Thought, after Northrop Frye's essay on "Varieties of Literary

Utopias," an anonymous reader has pencilled (in response to Frye's assertion that the only answer to the question "where is utopia?" is "here") the extrapolated claim that "Utopia is the only answer to Dystopia." But utopia is not necessarily, or at least not simply, the answer to dystopia. To my way of thinking, in fact, in feminist speculation, dystopia is more likely to be an answer to utopia.

Crowley's speculations that the utopian and the millenarian are different aspects of the same impulse are provocative for any consideration of the relationship between utopia and dystopia. However, I find myself resisting, or at least recasting, his conclusions. Crowley asserts that, since the utopian genre was solidified with Thomas More's generically eponymous island of Utopia, which was a model or paradigm or suggestion of what a good place might look like, the thrust of the utopian impulse has been redirected by Comenius and other utopists of the Baroque period towards global reform. These utopias were animated by the conviction that "nothing less than total renewal [would] do," that "the whole of past human culture has been a mistake, and has to be cleared out of the way, or overgrown, or supplanted," and that "human society as it stands is a total failure [which] will collapse of its own contradictions very soon and the new form of civilization had better be ready" to replace it (Crowley 8). The Rosicrucians epitomized this version of the utopian impulse in the title of their pamphlet "The Universal

Reformation of the Whole Wide World" (qtd. in Crowley 8).

The distinctions between kinds or versions of utopias which Crowley delineates are not the qualitative differences between abstract and concrete utopianism, but the quantitative differences between the "modest proposals" and the "total programmes" (8). The modest proposals--such as "model" cities--are often called, broadly, utopian, but Crowley sees the utopian impulse on the grand scale as embodied primarily in those utopists "who could entertain nothing less than a total renewal of society, a wholly other civilization rising out of the husk of the abandoned and collapsed old civilization" (8).

Crowley's paradigm of utopia's razing of the terrain of civilization in order to make way for the new leads us back, once again, to that curiously persistent metaphor of the harrowed cultural landscape with which I began this chapter. Crowley's notion that the vitally new must supplant the exhausted old echoes Bloch's notion of the "novum," the dynamic force of the new and unforseen which propels civilizations towards an as-yet unrealized future.

I would argue that in the feminist dystopia, however, the novum does not exist. That, in fact, it cannot exist. The novum is negated, not because of the structural pessimism of the utopian form, as Fitting would have it, but because what I will call the cultural ovum is far stronger. I have usurped the term ovum from the biological sciences in order to construct a parallel and oppositional term to Bloch's _novum_; the _ovum_ is, as I define it, that seed of the old which inevitably reinvests itself in the new, so that however harrowed the landscape, some offshoot of the old always forces itself up between the furrows. What critical discussion has yet to address is both the fact and the implications of feminist dystopia's institution of the _ovum_ as a force which is far more powerful than the _novum_. The old always inscribes itself, in the feminist utopia, over and upon the new. The past always inscribes itself onto the present, and beyond into the future. Although these inscriptions may take on new forms or structures, the strength of the cultural _ovum_ is such that it always overwrites, in the feminist dystopia, the potential for change that is implied by the _novum_.

Why is this? The answer to this question involves a return to the consideration of the relationship between utopia and dystopia. In this case, we must consider specifically the relation between the feminist utopia and the feminist dystopia. For while the traditional utopia and dystopia might be diagrammed as polar opposites, as prophecies or visions which negate or contradict each other, the feminist utopia and the feminist dystopia are more like images in a mirror, evidencing strange reversals but recognizable as the same image.

Recent feminist utopias, it has been widely argued, dismantle the concept of historical inevitability. This process of deconstruction aids in the resistance of utopian writing against its own powerful generic impulse toward stasis, what Teresa de Lauretis calls its "strong pull toward narrative closure" ("Signs" 160). In the feminist utopian text, narrative closure exists only problematically. Critics of traditional utopias have argued that utopia exists in stasis. Critics of specifically feminist utopias have argued that such texts "liberate the political imagination" by envisioning an alternative, indeterminate future (Gilbert and Gubar, No Man's Land 116), and that such speculative narratives are ultimately the only kind of writing capable of rupturing reality, of "envisioning new responses in the face of patriarchal things-as-they-are" (Hollinger, "Alliance" 273). They assert that such acts of imagination are revolutionary in themselves. I agree. There is, however, unrecognized, a secondary yet equally revolutionary dialectic at play in the field of the feminist utopia. The feminist utopian text radically rejects the stasis of the traditional utopia and radically re-lineates the eschatological time-line. It re-draws the line of time as a Moëbius strip, the interlocking self-perpetuating mathematical figure for eternity. Utopia, for women, is never an eschatological end-point because, for women, utopia is always the anomalous blip on the time-line; the utopian moment is always blessed but ephemeral. Even in the most utopian of feminist imaginings, there is never world enough and time. Instead, the utopian moment is tenuous and transient, informed always by an awareness of the dystopian past and threatened always by a re-assertion of the dystopian future.

Feminist utopists therefore encrypt into their creations the signifiers of uncertainty and fragility. These are often subtle, often sub-textual, but always there in some form. Marge Piercy's utopian community Mattapoisett, for example, in Woman on the Edge of Time, is under attack by those dystopian forces that it is necessary to defeat, not just once in order to establish the utopian community, but perpetually, in order to maintain it. While Luciente confidently repeats the warrior's battle cry, "an army of lovers cannot lose," (179) the grimly dystopian alternative future inhabited by Gildina (which Connie inadvertently visits when she wants to revisit Mattapoisett) suggests that such a future is always there, waiting to happen, always ready to reassert itself upon any loss of utopian vigilance. In Sally Miller Gearhart's The Wanderground, the Hill Women must confront, at the end of the novel, the question of whether or not they will accept the "Gentles," men who eschew violence, into their community. The community is fractured by this choice, and in their interminable council meetings on the subject, the liturgical history of male violence and abuse is repeatedly invoked as reason not to accept the Gentles; every time it is, the hegemonic utopianism of the community is shattered by the very act of invocation. Every time the members of the community remind themselves of the dystopian past, they reinsert that past, through their ritual memory of it and through its repeated evocation as warning, into their present. Instead of becoming admonitory, therefore, it ironically infects or contaminates the purity of the present utopia. Whatever the women's decision regarding the admission of the men, the community will inevitably change, since the very process of having to decide will change it. Joan Slonczewski's A Door into Ocean elaborates a similar dilemma: the pacifist women protagonists must choose either to admit capitalist, militaristic men into their world, or, in order to defend it, to change their values, themselves, and their utopia.

Even in works in which the oppositional struggle between utopian and dystopian forces is not obvious, encoded textual devices sketch out the shadows of such a struggle enacted beneath the surface of the text. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland, for example, the feminist utopia is not overtly besieged. The women of the all-female utopia are willing, in fact eager, to admit men into their midst, yet the attempted assimilation is dismally unsuccessful, and ends with the men's expulsion. The title of the novel's sequel, With Her in Ourland, in which the male narrator of Herland takes his new wife with him into the world beyond her utopia, suggests that utopia is left behind as a place where assimilation cannot be achieved, and which, moreover, because its secret location is now known, is left unprotected and vulnerable. The way in which the titles of the two novels situate the reader, moreover, is significant; they identify him or her as an alien to utopia and a perennial outsider, since "Herland" is not so much the title of the community as its descriptor, that which marks it as hers, theirs, and not ours. The title of the sequel further suggests that "Ourland" is always where "we" are, while "her" land is a place we can never get to, even if it survives "our" incursion. Since the last sentence actually spoken and recorded by any of the male visitors is Terry's threat to "get an expedition fixed up to force an entrance into Ma-land" (146), the survival of Herland, even after the men promise not to betray it, is problematic.

The feminist utopia is portrayed, inevitably, as fragile, tenuous, and precariously balanced on the cusp of an evanescent historical moment. While utopographers have noted that feminist utopian writing departs from the convention of traditional utopia in that it privileges change, growth, and diversity, none have yet considered that the bleaker side of that multiplicity speaks also to the friability of the feminist utopian community. Donna Young's Retreat! is an obvious example of this: the novel is situated in the liminal space between the fall of one civilization and the rise of another. The name of Joanna Russ's all-female utopian planet Whileaway is similarly thought-provoking, suggesting much the same awareness of impermanence, as does the title of the

Nebula Award-winning short story in which Russ first wrote of Whileaway: "When It Changed."

Criticism has recognized neither this suggestive departure, in the feminist text, from the generic convention of the static utopia, nor its significance.[10] In his notorious article "Reactionary Utopias," for example, Gregory Benford defines what he labels the "reactionary" or "non-progressive" utopia as one which partakes of the following qualities: it is static in time; it suffers a lack of social diversity; it is nostalgic and technophobic; it is structured around a prophet or authority figure; it regulates social behaviour through guilt. In none of these qualifications is gender mentioned. However, Benford clearly considers the reactionary or regressive utopia (he uses the terms interchangeably)[11] as primarily the purview of the feminist utopist. His list of "progressive" writers, for example, comprises Samuel Delany, Franz Wertel, Edward Bellamy, and William Morris. His list of "reactionaries" consists of Ursula K. Le Guin, Suzy McKee Charnas, Marge Piercy, James Tiptree, Jr. (Alice Sheldon), and Joanna Russ. Perhaps the reader is not intended to notice that this list divides itself so entirely along gender lines; perhaps Benford himself is not wholly aware of it. This seems unlikely, however; although Benford devotes only a few very brief paragraphs to examining his reactionary utopias as specifically feminist texts, his awareness that they are all written by women seems to permeate, unpleasantly, the way he reads them. He derides what he sees as the naively benevolent view of human nature portrayed in Le Guin's The Dispossessed, for example, by claiming that "in her world, a quiet talk over herbal tea will surely fix matters up" (17). When he does speak of these texts as concerned with gender, it is condescendingly and dismissively. In the "primarily reactive" feminist texts that are "responding to perceived masculine evils," it is, he states, "natural for women to extend the family as a model" for the utopian community,

> since they have not, up to now, experienced society as a whole from a more masculine viewpoint--as a focus of conflicting forces. It is not surprising that the problem of control doesn't rear its vexing head in such utopias, and that the principal problem seems to be work assignments (who's going to do the dishes?). (18)

Largely, I suspect, because of its condescending and derisive tone, Benford's article provoked a storm of controversy. He made, in fact, a somewhat recantatory gesture in a subsequent issue of the Australian Science Fiction Review, claiming that most readers would probably "not allow for" his "tongue-in-cheek ferocity" (31); since ASFR correspondents subsequently called his work everything from "grotesquely inept and malicious" to "vicious nonsense" (Talbot 11, 17), he is probably right. However irritating Benford's tone, it is less important than the assertions he makes about the unrealistic perfection of the feminist utopia in which all people are fundamentally good, non-competitive, and in which "the problem of control is simply neglected" (19). As I have shown, variations on this critical theme are prolific, yet even a rudimentary consideration of the texts Benford labels reactionary will show that they are not static, they are not nostalgic, they are not technophobic or homogeneous or autocratic, and they are certainly not neglectful of issues of power and control. Far from illustrating Benford's vision of the mushy-feminist utopia, its citizens safely contained within its static confines, drinking herbal tea and quibbling, gently, over who will wash the cups, the utopias with which I am familiar are engaged in a complicated dialectical dance with those very issues of power and control which Benford sees them as neglecting.

The subtext of the feminist utopia is dystopia. I have claimed that utopia and dystopia are, in feminist speculative texts, mirror images, and this is why. But while dystopia always exists interlineally in the utopian text, the dystopian text is generally unleavened by utopia. While the feminist utopia is presented as ephemeral, the feminist dystopia is presented as permanent, as the normal and normative configuration of culture. The dystopian moment, unlike the utopian, is eternal, and merely waiting to reassert itself over the anomalously utopian.

The contemporary feminist dystopia therefore shares with the traditional utopia a movement towards stasis and closure:

of text, of culture, of history. The traditional utopia depends upon a perfection that is sealed in and preserved, protected by distance from the corrupting influences of time and contact with non-utopian societies. The dystopia is also, however, a genre of stasis. Dystopian government typically maintains its oppressive power by enforcing stasis. As George Orwell demonstrates in Nineteen Eighty-Four, its absolute power enables totalitarian government to rewrite both language and history in order to remove dystopian culture from the flow of change. The ultimate goal of the leadership of Oceania is, in Nineteen Eighty-Four, to so shrink and limit the cultural lexicon that "thoughtcrime" will be not only forbidden but impossible. Language will become so attenuated that there will remain no linguistic framework for resistance or for change. The Ministry of Truth's revisionary propaganda re-writes history, it is true, but the change this seems to promote is illusory: the Ministry of Truth creates an imaginary history in order to arrest the present. The kind of stasis that the traditional dystopian impulse strives to maintain is illustrated in the vision of the future which Orwell has O'Brien offer to Winston Smith: "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face--forever" (220).

If (traditional) utopia is a dream because it never changes, then dystopia is a nightmare for the same reason. The stasis of the traditional utopia protects it from incursion by change, by any of the social and cultural forces that build and destroy empires. The traditional utopia exists outside of history because it has been taken out of history; a cyclical model of time, in which all things rise and fall in their season, is replaced by a linear paradigm fraught with teleological import. It is thus represented as the end product of time, the perfection and culmination of time, and the point at which time ends. Like traditional utopian writing, the feminist dystopia tends to be static; its stasis, however, signifies very differently from that of the traditional utopia. The dystopian textual economy, like its social economy, is laid out for readers through any of a number of didactic devices, such as the revised text of the American Constitution and quotations from imaginary history books that are supplied in Suzette Haden Elgin's texts, or the book that Alfred inherits in Swastika Night. Although dystopian texts may themselves be structurally fractured, the societies they delineate are monolithic. While the intervention of a protagonist, such as Alldera in Walk to the End of the World or Alfred in Swastika Night, may appear to puncture that stasis, the hermetic nature of dystopia is such that it covers over such ruptures, fills in its own holes, and always reasserts its own hegemony in the end.

Northrop Frye asserts that the answer to the query "where is utopia?" is "here" (49). According to narratives of feminist dystopia, "here" is a more appropriate answer to the question "where is dystopia?" If utopia is, as Frances Bartkowsi maintains, "anywhere but here and now" (4), then dystopia is always here, always now, and its most terrifying feature is that the dystopian "now" is eternal.

The difficulty of representing dystopia is therefore distinct from that of representing utopia. If the problem of feminist utopia is that it can only be represented in an interstitial, interdiscursive, interlocutory space, the problem of feminist dystopia is that it can be represented all too clearly. If utopia exists away from the surfaces of the real, if it exists anywhere but here and now, then dystopia manifests itself too concretely for comfort in the malleable flesh of its citizens. (Take another placard. Better yet, find the one you wrote on before, and use its blank obverse. Write on it the word "DYSTOPIA." Now, while the ink is still wet, press it to your forehead. This is the dilemma of dystopia.)

Dystopia imprints itself stigmatically upon its inhabitants. Consider the state-executed bodies dangling on the Wall in The Handmaid's Tale, their corpses become a corpus, a body of work explicating their crimes, to which the more literal signs around their necks provide only a secondary and unnecessary exegesis. Consider the proliferation, in dystopian texts, of brandings, tattooings, ritual scarifications. Consider the decorative dyes used to give expensive pet fems, in Charnas's Walk to the End of the World, the appearance of exotically-pelted animals, another skin-text spelling out the dialectic of status and power within the dystopian economy. If we cannot situate utopia, the texts I will examine seem to suggest, we can certainly situate dystopia: it expounds itself emblematically on the skins of its victims.

If there is no time for resistance in the feminist dystopia (because dystopian time is eternal, because the dystopian will always reassert itself over the utopian), there is also no space for resistance. Within the dystopian cultural economy, the body is the most important place in which resistance can be situated, and is therefore the only place it is clearly represented. The novels I examine are remarkably unconcerned with politics as they exist apart from the body; the political and politicized body is the ultimate site of exploration. Each dystopian government is represented, for example, as always already successful in its inception: the story of the struggle against the rise of the oppressive power is generally elided or occluded. The sociopolitical intricacies of the founding of Gilead, Hitlerianism, the Holdfast, or Women's Country are pushed to the textual margins, referred to obliquely or with a startling brevity. The text of political activism and organized resistance is generally kept hidden, as it must be in dystopian culture in order for its operations to continue. We never actually meet, for example, a member of the subversive Mayday organization in The Handmaid's Tale, only suspected members or those who, possibly deceitfully, claim or imply membership. In Walk to the End of the World, as well, we learn of the existence of the young fems' resistance organization only through hearsay; we never see decisive evidence of it. The marginality of organized resistance is instructive; the politics we see represented most frequently and most immediately are inevitably the politics of the body. The unnecessary amputation of Nazareth Chornyak's breasts in the opening scenes of Native Tongue, for example, tells us all that we really need to know about the political workings of Elgin's dystopian future.

Even the space of the body as a place of potential revolution is, however, systematically undermined by the dystopian impulse. The role of the body in resistance, its possibilities and limitations, will therefore be the central focus of this study. In "Flesh Politics: The Body Silenced," I examine how Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, Suzy McKee Charnas's Walk to the End of the World, and Katharine Burdekin's Swastika Night all portray the female body as a bounded, circumscribed, closed system; the female body is intended to become, as the Handmaids-in-training are instructed to be, "impermeable." Each of these three texts examines resistance as an act, not of speaking the unspeakable, but of broaching the unbroachable, of opening up the body to inundation from within, to the "disorderly bubbling over" with which revolution begins (Ehrenreich xvi). However, if resistance is, as I argue, intumescent, the revolutionary incision that releases it can rebound painfully upon dissident flesh. Within the dystopia, rupture can be at once a revolutionary act and the punishment for committing it, as the penetrated and perforated bodies proliferating in these texts painfully demonstrate. The paradox of the resisting body is that it is also a body constrained, opened at one's own risk.

Like the subaltern flesh of woman, strategies of resistance and survival are ambivalently stigmatized. In my second chapter, "Dirty Politics: The Compromised Body," I use Joanna Russ's The Female Man and Sheri S. Tepper's The Gate To Women's Country to examine alternate possibilities and impossibilities of opposition. The "compromised body" of this chapter is ambiguous in its status, actions, and consequences. Unlike the silenced body, the compromised body is not a closed system, hermetically sealed, infibulated by the dystopian clasp of culture. Neither, however, is it open to infinite possibility. The compromised body is never an open-and-shut case. It is, instead, riddled: with holes, with wounds, with contradictions. In "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," Donna Haraway has postulated that, although monstrous and illegitimate, the cyborg (just one of the many forms of bodily compromise occurring in these texts) offers potent suggestions for "some very fruitful couplings" (191). While the compromised body sings, as it were, the body eclectic, such myths may be born at the cost of strange, possibly fatal metamorphoses. The genetically engineered citizens of Women's Country, like Russ's surgically adapted warrior-women, are red in tooth and claw, their steel teeth or manicured nails dripping with literal or figurative blood. Both Tepper and Russ subversively invoke the language of medical discourse to suggest that corruption and mutation are inevitable when the female body arms itself against oppression. However, just as Jael, who calls herself the "plague system" between two worlds, is at once monstrous and irresistible, a locus of despair and hope, that "corruption" may be, like cancer, the only form of growth possible in the dystopian taxonomy.

Finally, in "Speech Impediments: The Adumbrated Body," I examine Suzette Haden Elgin's Native Tongue and The Judas Rose, both of which suggest the possibility of language for a revolution that leaves the body behind or re-creates it through a renewed and redeemed language. Elgin attempts to posit a new kind of subject who speaks a new tongue, a revolting language that allows for opposition and yet does not position itself only as opposite to patriarchal authority. Ideally, a new language can be insurgent, constructing new arenas of speech and thought, generating a revolutionary new reality that exists, to paraphrase James Tiptree's famous line from her story "The Women Men Don't See," in the chinks of the word machine. However, Elgin experiences difficulties in working out these linguistic possibilities. Some of the difficulties are simply problems of translation; paradoxically, Elgin's novels must themselves be written in the very language she decries as oppressive. How can the resisting body speak freely in a death-dealing langauge? More serious, however, are the difficulties that arise from the problem of freeing the material body through a tool that is immaterial. While both novels assert that change in the realm of language can literally reshape reality, Elgin's inability to construct, even in her speculative texts, a body that is free from patriarchal and heterosexual constraints undermines this, and leaves the reader with a body that is not newly constituted so much as provocatively adumbrated.

While each of these seven novels is remarkably similar in its postulation of a dystopian culture founded upon a militaristic male hierarchy which asserts ownership over the bodies and reproductive capacities of women, they are distinct in their formulations of the dynamics, structures, and rhetorics of a resistance that is always problematic, always necessary. The resisting body is plagued, to borrow Russ's metaphor, with complications, with collusions, with compromises. While each of these novels reaches, in a different way, towards an oppositional enterprise that is, in itself, utopian, the dystopian cultures portrayed in these novels overwrite resistance, as they overwrite the resisting body, with the irresistible discontents of the dystopian text.

Notes to Chapter One

1.Bloch's categories, discussed in The Principle of Hope, parallel Marx's and Engels' distinction between "utopian" and "scientific" socialism; Engels elaborates this distinction in Socialism: Utopian and Scientific. See Anne K. Mellor's "On Feminist Utopias" for an elaboration of this connection.

2.See Raymond Williams' "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory" in Problems in Materialism and Culture.

3.In "Varieties of Literary Utopias," Northrop Frye reflects on the reasons for this discomfort with the utopian, postulating the following dialogue between utopist and reader:

> Reader: "I can see that this society might work, but I wouldn't want to live in it." Writer: "What you mean is that you don't want your present ritual habits disturbed. My utopia would feel different from the inside, where the ritual habits would be customary and so carry with them a sense of freedom rather than constraint." Reader: "Maybe so, but my sense of freedom right now is derived from not being involved in your society. If I were, I'd either feel constraint or I'd be too unconscious to be living a fully human life at all." (31)

4.The term "separatist" must be stretched when speaking of separatism in relation to Whileaway, since Whileaway has, simply, no men; a one-gendered world can surely only problematically be labelled separatist in the sense in which it is generally used.

5.For this reason, the Voyage to the Moon genre lent itself particularly well to satire. See, for example, Lucian of Samosata's "Icaromennipus," a Menippian satire in which Icarus constructs a pair of wings with which he flies to the moon in order to observe the ludicrous doings of the court with greater perspective.

6.See, for example, Robert Plank's article "The Geography of Utopia: Psychological Factors Shaping the 'Ideal' Location."

7.For more on Marin's linguistic play with the terms utopia/eutopia/outopia, see his prefatory chapter "The Neutral: Playtime in Utopia," in which he explores particularly the resonance of the outopian "O": "a fractured circle in the micro-space it enclosed by epsilon-omega. The O is also an open mouth and expiration of breath through this opening, and of which the omega is only an excess: surprise, astonishment, and admiration, but also interference, noise and disorder" (xvi).

8.See Joanna Russ, "The Subjunctivity of Science Fiction," and Samuel R. Delany, "About Five Thousand, One Hundred and Seventy-Five Words."

9.Russ describes this phenomenon in several of her review columns published in The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction; Roz Kaveney cites the phrase in her article "The Science Fictiveness of Women's Science Fiction" (80).

10.Ruth Levitas briefly mentions, in "The Future of Thinking about the Future," that the contemporary utopian strategy of "collective questioning" poses a challenge to "criticisms of utopia as static, perfect and totalitarian" (260-61), but she makes these remarks specifically in the context of postmodernist technique and does not apply them to the treatment of time or history in the feminist utopia, nor does she explore the implications of such a claim for a specifically revisionist, anti-conventional, generic strategy.

11.In the course of the heated correspondence following the publication of Benford's article in the Australian Science Fiction Review, Norman Talbot observes Benford's misuse of the terms "reactionary" and "regressive" by commenting: "Let us hope that when he employs a word to do a job for which it is so obviously untrained he follows Humpty Dumpty's example and pays it extra" (11).

Chapter II
Flesh Politics: The Body Silenced

"The notion of resistance, however, is itself not unambiguous."

Teresa de Lauretis

In Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, Suzy McKee Charnas's Walk to the End of the World, and Katharine Burdekin's Swastika Night, the dystopian impulse locates itself ultimately in female flesh. Dystopian civilization describes its discontents in and on the female body, upon its organs of sense, speech, and reproduction. Power inheres in the erect phallus, tool of subjugation and conquest; the Other space is merely unoccupied territory, unmapped, ungoverned, awaiting colonization. Within this paradigm "Woman is," as Julia Kristeva explains it, "an eternal dissident in relation to social and political consensus, in exile from power, and therefore always singular, fragmentary, demonic, a witch" (Polylogue 519). The nature of this dissidence, however, becomes extremely ambivalent when power, whether centralized, militarized, global, as in Walk to the End of the World and Swastika Night, or localized, marginalized, transitory, as in The Handmaid's Tale, manifests itself in ownership of the female body--its form, function, constituent parts, substance, and entirety. When the phallic pen figures the corporeal female body as the corporate female body, unaccommodated woman is commodified, trade-marked, becomes company property; to resist this incorporation, she must fight for, with, but also against her own body, now branded with the very signs and seals she is attempting to contest. To strike outwards at the phallic root of power is also to risk one's own dis-memberment; to erase the traces of that power is to risk self-erasure; to eradicate the mark of authority is to risk the expurgation of one's own flesh. Within the dystopian economy, the de-marcation of the marked body demands a resistance that cuts both ways.

The Handmaid's Tale: No bomb in Gilead

"The women say, truly is this not magnificent? The vessels are upright, the vessels have acquired legs. The sacred vessels are on the move."

Monique Wittig

"Such things happen in the world time and time again and it is not our place to judge them. It is not our place to say yes or no. As a matter of fact, it is not our place to say anything at all. It is our place to shut up and be quiet while I am talking."

Joanna Russ

Perhaps a double-edged quality is implicit in resistance, reflected in the tension between the singular and the dual, the monolithic and the multiplicit, the "I" of the individual and the "We" of the Movement, all interlaced and interconnected, all suggesting, as the narrator of The Handmaid's Tale might surmise, "the possibilities of the word undone" (24). All requiring, for extradition, a cutting edge. And this is where difficulties occur; as Margaret Atwood has said elsewhere of the interstices of politics and writing, "any knife can cut two ways" ("Nice" 24). The emblematic tattoos carved into the ankles of the Handmaids, cataloguing and confirming them as a "national resource" (61), embody the visible markings performed by patriarchy upon female flesh; like less literal inscriptions, they cannot be removed without further scarification. In The Handmaid's Tale, as in the other dystopias considered in this chapter, resistance inevitably entails an act of radical self-scission.

Feminist criticism has undertaken a similarly avulsive or surgical stratagem, subdividing the category of the body as deconstructionist criticism has subdivided the category of the subject. Postmodernism's "ontological disruption" (Waugh, Feminine 2) has exposed the individual subject as a mythical and mystified construct; a similar sceptical attention turned upon the body has revealed that, as Elizabeth Grosz points out,

> there is no monolithic category, "the body." There are only particular kinds of bodies. Where one (the youthful, white, middle-class male body) functions as a representative of all bodies, its domination must be overcome through a defiant affirmation of the autonomies of other kinds of bodies/subjectivities. ("Notes" 9)

In The Handmaid's Tale, however, the cultural conditions of

Gilead have made such defiance untenable. Patriarchal authority has constructed a female body that is unitary and self-contained, defined by its singular purpose of reproduction. This imaginary body is conceived as whole, not because of a rejection of the dualistic or dichotomized paradigms of the self suggested by western philosophy, but because the totalitarian power of the state apparatus enables that paradigm to be literally imposed and enacted upon female flesh. The concern of "Offred"[1] for the distinction of insides and outsides, plenitudes and vacancies, agents and vessels demonstrates her immersion in and struggles against this discourse, one in which the body has been incarcerated and split off from any animating interiority. The bounding of the body defines it as a closed system; it becomes, as Aunt Lydia exhorts her charges at the Rachel and Leah Centre to be, "impermeable" (28). Therefore, resistance, in Atwood's dystopia, consists in breaching the unbreachable: in opening up the body, not to penetration from without, but to inundation from within. "Every revolution," as Barbara Ehrenreich observes, "starts with a disorderly bubbling over of passion and need" (xvi). Resistance is intumescent; the revolutionary incision that releases it is, however, not made without pain, nor, as even Offred's sanguine imaginings repeatedly make clear, without blood.

Women have traditionally, according to Patricia Waugh, used their bodies "as instruments of protest against their 'feminine' positioning and identification"; the

> bodily symptom--paralysis, tics, phobias, coughs, ritual behaviour like hand-washing--"speaks" or signifies the conflict produced within the psyche as a consequence of the organization of sexuality and the acquisition of gender. Hysteria can thus be seen as both a "symptom" of powerlessness and a form of resistance to power. (Feminine 174)

Like glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, hysteria can be a form of "speaking," even if its speech occurs in a form we do not or cannot recognize. The symptoms of the body "speak" the hysteric's experience in a way that the dominant discourse would otherwise disallow. The paradox of this particular kind of corporeal opposition is, however, readily apparent: such symptoms may signify discontent with existing structures of power, but by pathologizing the dissenting subject they further isolate and weaken her in relation to those same structures. The "hysterical" body ultimately compromises only itself. Atwood makes this clear early in the text of The Handmaid's Tale. Offred's desire to enter into the dialogue of Rita and Cora, the household "Marthas," seems at first to confirm Waugh's model of resistance: we could, Offred speculates wistfully,

> sit at Rita's kitchen table, which is not Rita's any more than my table is mine, and we would talk, about aches and pains, illnesses, our feet, our backs, all the different

> kinds of mischief that our bodies, like unruly children, can get up to. . . . We would exchange remedies and try to outdo each other in the recital of our physical miseries; gently we would complain, our voices soft and minor-key and mournful as pigeons in the eaves troughs. I know what you mean, we'd say. (10)

Like most forms of resistance in Gilead, however, this is a self-defeating enterprise; the "aches and pains" of the women afflict and inconvenience no one but themselves. More seriously, complaining about them is merely a way to dissipate, as do the carefully choreographed Prayvaganzas and Particicutions, otherwise dangerous energies. The sense of community such dialogue might engender is, as Offred's relations with the rest of the household demonstrate, both temporary and artificial. At best such exchanges are a harmless kind of mischief, like the innocent "mischief" of the unruly but powerless body. At worst they are collusive, occurring in a room only deceptively suggesting a domestic haven, around a kitchen table that is as much a part of the patriarchal furniture as the rest of the house.

Just as the supposedly female space of the kitchen has been absorbed and accommodated by phallocentric power structures, the female body as the final preserve of resistance has been likewise appropriated. The scene in the kitchen becomes a trope for this phenomenon, modelling such appropriations again and again. The fact that the kitchen encounter is only wistfully imagined by Offred, that it occurs only in the "what if" of the subjunctive tense and never in reality, reinforces the ambivalence of such an encounter as potentially subversive.

The same contingency is reflected in Offred's illicit meetings with the chauffeur Nick. While it appears that Offred's assertion of her own sexuality outside the permission structures of Gilead's theocracy represents an act of rebellion, her inability to narrate the truth of these encounters exposes them as, at best, ambiguously oppositional--as ambiguous, in fact, as Nick's own role in the text. Offred's continual revisions of their first meeting qualify her accounts, infusing them with uncertainty; like all the stories Offred tells, they are products of their own impermanence. Offred's confession that "I made that up. It didn't happen that way. Here is what happened" (245) is immediately underwritten by a second account, also followed by "It didn't happen that way either" and by "I'm not sure how it happened; not exactly. All I can hope for is a reconstruction" (246). This is largely, it seems to me, because all Offred's illicit interactions with Nick, like both her licit and illicit interactions with the Commander, are in truth reconstructions, often laughably parodic reconstructions, of pre-Gilead social codes. Offred makes this explicit in one of the many reconstructed versions of her first secret meeting with Nick:

> "You come here often?"
>
> "And what's a nice girl like me doing in a spot like this," I reply. We both smile: this is better. This is an acknowledgment that we are acting, for what else can we do in such a setup?
>
> "Abstinence makes the heart grow fonder." We're quoting from late movies, from the time before. And the movies then were from a time before that: this sort of talk dates back from an era well before our own. Not even my mother talked like that, not when I knew her. Possibly nobody ever talked like that in real life, it was all a fabrication from the beginning. Still, it's amazing how easily it comes back to mind, this corny and falsely gay sexual banter. I can see now what it's for, what it was always for: to keep the core of yourself out of reach, enclosed, protected. (246)

Like the commodities black market, publicly condemned, privately condoned and exploited, the sexual black market has been absorbed into the power structures of Gilead, and, like all such accommodations, works not to challenge but to aid and perpetuate those structures. The text is full of examples of this: Janine's impregnation by her doctor, Nick's intervention as procurer between Offred and the Commander, Serena Joy's mediation between Nick and Offred. Gilead's strength is in its ability to commandeer and co-opt even potentially emancipatory activities and assimilate them into its own workings. As Anne Cranny-Francis points out, the dystopian process of "women's interpellation as subjects by patriarchal ideology" inevitably renders them "susceptible to, even collusive with, their own exploitation" (141). When all social interaction has become integrated into and reflective of that ideology, any activity at all risks collusion, as does declining to act. Offred's postulation of a "core" self that is "enclosed" and "protected" from the juridical practises of Gilead is therefore naive and illusory.

It is specifically this longing for enclosure, articulated in the passage above, that undermines such sexual exchanges as Offred's and Nick's as revolutionary practice. The Handmaid's Tale continually evokes the notion of closure and its absence; the text itself is bounded and enclosed between its epigraphs and the Historical Notes, a framing device that constructs the body of the text as self-reflexive, a mise-en-abyme endlessly reflecting itself and infinitely re-contextualized between the points of its beginning and its end.[2] Atwood's construction of the revolutionary body echoes, in this, the convolutions of the textual body. The constant textual tension between insides and outsides, surfaces and depths, things visible and hidden is reflected in the tension between the body as closed and contained and the body as opened: to penetration, to predation, to possibilities.

The dystopian desire to assert hegemonic control over women's bodies is demonstrated, in The Handmaid's Tale, in the phallocentric impulse to seal off and enclose that body. In Gilead the female body must be not merely isolated but contained.[3] It must be hermetic, pregnable only by, at the need or desire of, the patriarch. The phallocracy asserts control over the body by asserting control over its permeability. The Handmaids salute each other with the incantatory phrase "May the Lord open" (19), but the breaching of the Handmaid's body remains the prerogative of the Commander and, despite his liturgical invocation of Old Testament precedent at the regular ritualized rape of the Handmaid, the Lord has very little to do with it. The patriarchs of Gilead desire a female body that is closed until they choose to open it. It is in this sense that the open body becomes a dangerous and dissident body; such a body risks, in the dystopian economy, the final subjugation of complete closure.

Claudine Herrmann, in The Tongue Snatchers (Les Voleuses de langue), explores the ways in which space, for women, is defined as always violable: "The term 'space' can express very different things: for each of us there exist a physical space and a mental space. These two have in common the fact that they can be invaded: the first by violence, the second by indiscretion" (113). The only thing more important, for the female body, than its enclosure is its pregnability to the patriarchal will. Herrmann examines, in the same volume, a short story by Barbey d'Aurevilly, "At a Dinner of

Atheists," which graphically illustrates the patriarchal polarities of the open and closed body. This scene recounts the murder, by Major Ydow, of his promiscuous mistress Rosalba when she flaunts her infidelity to him:

> The major had pushed [Rosalba] down on to the table at which she had been writing, and was holding her there with a grip of iron. All her clothes had been torn off in the struggle and her beautiful, naked body was twisting like a wounded snake in his grasp. But what do you think he was doing with his other hand, gentlemen? The writing-table, the lighted candle, the wax lying beside it--all these things had given the major a diabolical idea--that of sealing [her] as she had sealed the letter--and he was furiously carrying out this terrible vengeance of a perversely jealous lover!
>
> "Be punished where you have sinned, you harlot!" he was crying. (cited in Herrmann 89-90)

Like the torturous sewing up of Eugénie de Mistival's mother in de Sade's Philosophy in the Boudoir, Rosalba's punishment annihilates her sexuality (Carter 117). Angela Carter sees Eugénie's attack on her mother's genitals as a "seizure of her own autonomy" which "necessitates the rupture of all the taboos she can apprehend" (124). It is true that the Sadeian libertines defy all taboos, but the rupturing is less important, it seems to me, than its opposite, the restoration of sexual hermeticism implicit in the act of infibulating the threatening maternal gap. Rosalba's long-lost virginity is mockingly and malignantly reinstated through the grotesque symbolism of Ydow's act; Madame de Mistival's symbolically preserved virginity, an affront to the libertines, is punished by being made literal. Both episodes resonate, in The Handmaid's Tale, with the scenes in the Commander's study. Like Rosalba's fatal confrontation with Ydow, Offred's encounters with the Commander also take place across a desk, are also cluttered with the transgressive implements of writing, and could also end in a death sentence. Like Bluebeard's chamber,[4] the study is the "forbidden room" where "women do not go" except to engage in dangerous games (128). The body that dares to assert its own imperviousness against the patriarchal seal will be forcibly and fatally closed.

One of the ways in which this tension between openness and closure is reflected in the text is in the names of the Handmaids. Certainly the most important feature of these names is that they establish the Handmaids as property, as objects "Of" their owner. Like the fems in Walk to the End of the World who are proscribed the magic pronoun "I" in order to deny them a sense of individuality and personhood, the Handmaids' patronymic overwrites and occludes any previous identity. Even the name of Offred's stolen daughter disappears in this process, always reduced merely to "she" or "her," a nameless product of an anonoymous ancestry. I suspect, however, that there is a further significance in that the names of the Handmaids all begin with the letter "O," a letter rich in signification both in feminist criticism and speculative fiction. It is the "O" of de Beauvoir's "Other"; it is the graphic representation of the sex which is not one. Like the circles proliferating in the fiction of Monique Wittig and Louky Bersianik, the "O" is potentially redemptive, representing a reclaiming and filling of empty space, a plenitude negating lack and absence. The "O" of dystopian literature, however, while establishing resonances with the utopian "O," overshadows it with invocations of the cultural assertions of female emptiness. In The Handmaid's Tale the "O"s prefacing the patronymics of Offred, Ofglen, Ofwarren, et al. delimit the Handmaid's sexuality as at once open, hollow, gaping, and as bounded, bonded, circumscribed. They are enclosed yet penetrable, essentially a hole. The "O" also figures a numeric zero: the Handmaids are nothing, count as nothing. This absence is echoed in the "Historial Notes," in which Professor Pieixoto urges his listeners to decentralize Offred, to see her as "one of many" (287); the whole phallolithic thrust of his address, however, re-phrases this admonition; Offred in fact becomes, in Pieixoto's treatment of her, not merely one, but none of many.

Atwood's use of the letter "O" in naming Offred also generates intertextual tensions with other sources. In Feminist Alternatives: Irony and Fantasy in the Contemporary Novel by Women, Nancy A. Walker observes that The Handmaid's

Tale rewrites Nathanial Hawthorne's classic text The Scarlet Letter; while noting many pregnant correspondences, however, Walker does not speculate, as I do, that in The Handmaid's Tale Atwood's "O" replaces Hawthorne's notorious "A" as the genuine scarlet letter. While it is true that "Offred's story is in many ways the ironic inversion of Hester's," since "whereas Hester is punished for adultery, Offred is forced into it, both cultures using the same Bible as authority for their laws" (32), it is also true that both women's "sin" springs, as read by their respective cultures, from that monstrous carnality of which "O" is the cultural emblem. In discussing Pauline Réage's The Story of O, Gilbert and Gubar also make a connection to Hawthorne: "The scarlet letter A that Hawthorne had used in the nineteenth century to symbolize the crime of the adulteress now dissolved into the pornographic O that signified both the emptiness and the openness of an obediently serviceable woman" (No Man's 47). The "O" is, they elaborate, the "simultaneously pornographic and pictographic cave of female desire" (No Man's 269-70). The "vanishing point" of this "O," like that of the glamour magazines that "suggested an endless series of possibilities, extending like the reflections in two mirrors" (Handmaid 147), imposes itself on Offred's flesh, which is also simultaneously pornographic and pictographic; it reorganizes her body so that it is no longer, as she believes it used to be, "lithe, single, solid, one with me" (69). Only the phallus is allowed such monolithic status in the Republic of Gilead. The training which Gilead thrusts upon its "transitional generation" of Handmaids (111) seizes and warps that bodily "one" (which is at least partially mythical; The Handmaid's Tale clearly critiques pre- and non-Gilead culture as much as it does Gilead itself), turning it in upon itself, twisting it, conjoining its ends to reformulate it as a zero, the blank "O."

That "O" can become whole in Gileadan theology, as in Freudian psychology's interpretation of female sexuality, only through fulfilment of its designated and destined biological function. As Sara Lefanu observes, "failure of function is punishable by death" in Gilead (73). There is more than one kind of death at stake, however. Offred's reluctant complicity in the Gileadan system of values clarifies this. While shopping with Ofglen, for example, Offred recognizes Janine who is

> vastly pregnant; her belly, under her loose garment, swells triumphantly. There is a shifting in the room, a murmur, an escape of breath; despite ourselves we turn our heads, blatantly, to see better; our fingers itch to touch her. She's a magic presence to us, an object of envy and desire, we covet her. She's a flag on a hilltop, showing us what can still be done: we too can be saved. (25)

Offred reflects: "Each month I watch for blood, fearfully, for when it comes it means failure. I have failed once again to fulfil the expectations of others, which have become my own" (69, my emphasis). And, when her menstrual period arrives, she feels "empty, again, again." (70). Gileadan ideology triumphs in its ability to convince women that they are empty, and to accept and even welcome that emptiness. At the Rachel and Leah Reeducation Centre, for example, Offred recalls that

> what we prayed for was emptiness, so we would be worthy to be filled: with grace, with love, with self-denial, semen and babies.
>
> Oh God, King of the universe, thank you for not creating me a man.
>
> Oh God, obliterate me. Make me fruitful. Mortify my flesh, that I may be multiplied. Let me be fulfilled. (182)

As the patriarchs of Gilead intend, this obsession with their own emptiness distracts the Handmaids from the dangerous truth that the female body is in fact replete with revolutionary possibility. There are bitter ironies, therefore, implicit in Offred's complicated role as the Commander's mistress. "Outside woman, they used to be called," Offred reflects, echoing yet again the textual tensions between internal and external; "I am the outside woman" (153). She is ambivalently drawn towards the Commander because

> To him I'm no longer merely a usable body. To him I'm not just a boat with no cargo, a chalice with no wine in it, an oven--to be crude--minus the bun. To him I am not merely empty. (153, my emphasis)

The Commander, in fact, knows very well that she is not empty, and that therein lies her danger. Offred's continual mistake in The Handmaid's Tale is her insistence on seeing revolution as external, as separate and distinct and somehow "out there": "I believe in the resistance," she says, "as I believe there can be no light without shadow; or rather, no shadow unless there is also light" (99). "There must be a resistance," Offred surmises, but images it always as elsewhere, exterior to her and to Gilead: "Someone must be out there, taking care of things" (99, my emphasis). In reality, resistance is internal, something that is within and a part of her own body, something which patriarchy demands be contained. The body is not, as Judith Butler points out, "a mere instrument or medium for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related" (8). It is, instead, as Elizabeth Grosz affirms, a "hinge or threshold between nature and culture" ("Notes" 8); it is also the threshold of resistance, contained by borders which are fluid and permeable, and which the dystopian impulse attempts always, in self-protection, to rigidify. "It's up to you," lies Aunt Lydia, "to set the boundaries" (43); the boundaries, however, are already set, and they are rock-solid. Offred herself knows this: "We are containers," she says, "it's only the insides of our bodies that are important. The outside can become hard and wrinkled, for all they care, like the shell of a nut" (90).

The conflict between the disorderly intumescence of resistance and the tamping, damping drive of dystopia is elaborated clearly in the text of The Handmaid's Tale. Offred's body has been made as hermetic as her environment; the glass in her window is shatterproof, not, she knows, to prevent her running away, but to preclude "those other escapes, the ones you can open in yourself, given a cutting edge" (8). Any rupture is dangerous, any edge forbidden. What Offred covets most of all, therefore, are cutting instruments: a kitchen knife, Serena Joy's garden shears. The ceremonial greeting of the Handmaids, "May the Lord open" (19), is intended to keep ideas of openness shrouded in concealing layers of mystification; only the Lord or, in His absence, the Commander may open the womb or the legs of the hermetic Handmaid. Almost despite herself, however, Offred discovers other, less legal, fissures. When she risks, with Ofglen, "subversion, sedition, blasphemy, heresy, all rolled into one" and thus confirms the existence of the resistance movement, Offred feels hope rising in her "like sap in a tree. Blood in a wound. We have made an opening" (158, my emphasis). Such openings generate, however, as Offred's wound imagery suggests, heavy admixtures of blood. Offred's mother observes, long before the inception of the Gileadan regime, "You can't stick your hand through a glass window without getting cut" (169). Openings occur at the risk of laceration; Atwood's double-bladed knife is constantly present in her paradigms of resistance. What Offred remembers from her mother's burning of pornographic magazines, for example, is "parts of womens' bodies, turning to black ash, in the air, before my eyes" (36). This scene from Offred's childhood prefigures the fragmentation of women's bodies which paradoxically results both from pornographic protocols and from the effort to counter those protocols. This same scene is replicated later by Aunt Lydia's screening of old porn films at the Rachel and Leah Centre:

> Women kneeling, sucking penises or guns, women tied up or chained or with dog collars around their necks, women hanging from trees, or upside-down, naked, with their legs held apart, women being raped, beaten up, killed. Once we had to watch a women being slowly cut into pieces, her fingers and breasts snipped off with garden shears, her stomach slit open and her intestines pulled out.
>
> Consider the alternatives, said Aunt Lydia. (112)

Women sent to the Colonies, declared "Unwomen" because of their unwomanly resistance, or their unwomanly failure to bear children, to be willing "two-legged wombs" (128), have a year or so before they too fall apart, go to pieces: "They figure you've got three years maximum, at those," Moira tells Offred, "before your nose falls off and your skin pulls away like rubber gloves" (233). The "Unbabies," those newborns whose bodies are irregular, are repudiated; if they are not perfect, they are discarded. The body can be easily controlled precisely because it is, as Offred reflects, "so easily damaged, so easily disposed of" (98-99). The message is clear: this is what happens to non-conforming flesh.

Perforation, the breaking of boundaries, unbottling, unbuttoning, is thus at once a revolutionary act and the punishment for committing it. Offred's first clearly subversive act is therefore appropriately construed in images of shattering and disintegration. Before she makes her first heterodox contact with Ofglen, she laughs at the Commander and his game of Scrabble, laughter that shakes her to pieces "like an epileptic fit," that breaks her composure:

> I stand up, in the dark, start to unbutton. Then I hear something, inside my body. I've broken, something has cracked, that must be it. Noise is coming up, coming out, of the broken place, in my face. . . . If I let the noise get out into the air it will be laughter, too loud, too much of it. . . . I cram both hands over my mouth as if I'm about to be sick, drop to my knees, the laughter boiling like lava in my throat. I crawl into the cupboard, draw up my knees, I'll choke on it. My ribs hurt with holding back, I shake, I heave, seismic, volcanic, I'll burst. Red all over the cupboard, mirth

> rhymes with birth, oh to die of laughter.
>
> I stifle it in the folds of the hanging cloak, clench my eyes, from which tears are squeezing. Try to compose myself. (138)

Like the "act of touch" Offred hungers to commit (11), the act of laughter is too revolutionary to be undone. Offred cannot re-compose herself as she was: rupture has occurred; the pieces cannot be rejoined; her body cannot be resealed. Significantly, as she falls asleep on the floor of the closet after this outburst, this bursting out, the one thing of which she is conscious is "the sound of [her] heart, opening and closing, opening and closing, opening" (138). The force of this movement fractures Offred as it fractures her narration, making her story as splintered as "a body caught in crossfire or pulled apart by force" (251). The opening and shutting of her heart echoes the text's shuttling between the narrative polarities of control and compulsion; the narrator is at once reluctant to speak and compelled to speak, at once exerts artistic control and experiences the story's resistance to and subversion of this control. Although Offred repeatedly asserts that she does not "want to be telling this story" (211), the narration itself rapidly takes on a discrete existence, and Offred, as narrator, disappears into the "blank . . . between parentheses" (213). The final pages of The Handmaid's Tale chronicle Offred's ultimate disappearance as narrator: a disappearance into the black van, "into the darkness within or else the light" (277), and, finally, into the margins of Professor Pieixoto's postscript. The narrative balances perpetually between Offred's self-composition and her decomposition.

Fragmentation seems, ironically, to be the price of wholeness in Gilead, or at least a necessary step in moving towards it. The Republic of Gilead opposes itself to fragmentation by insisting on borders and boundaries to the body; resistance punctures those boundaries at the cost of self-scission. Like von Weid's noxious programme for the "Reduction of Women" in Katharine Burdekin's Swastika Night, part of the control exercised by Gilead over the bodies of women depends on their homogenization. Handmaids, Wives, Marthas are all made, within their respective categories, interchangeable, by replacing their names with labels, by providing them with deindividuating costumes that indicate function by colour, and by concealing them in wings or draping them in veils. The costume of the "Econowives," with its bands of red, blue, and green fabric, materially conflates these different roles; low-status men cannot afford the conspicuous consumption of different brands of women and so must be content with women of their stripe. The Sons of Jacob are not content, however, merely to make the bodies of women interchangeable with those of other women; women's bodies must also be made interchangeable with other objects. The identity of things, in Gilead, is therefore unanchored.

Objects elide, repeatedly, into metaphors, into their reflections, into other objects, despite Offred's narrative attempts at singularization and contradistinction. Offred watches, for example, the bloody bodies of the executed hung as warnings on the Wall:

> I look at the one red smile. The red of the smile is the same as the red of the tulips in Serena Joy's garden, towards the base of the flowers where they are beginning to heal. The red is the same but there is no connection. The tulips are not tulips of blood, the red smiles are not flowers, neither thing makes a comment on the other. . . . Each thing is valid and really there. It is through a field of such valid objects that I must pick my way, every day and in every way. I put a lot of effort into making such distinctions. I need to make them. I need to be very clear, in my own mind. (32)

Offred's wilful segregation of objects is essential in the composition of her own subjectivity, since it simultaneously segregates, by extension, herself from other objects:

> I sit in the chair and think about the word _chair_. It can also mean the leader of a meeting. It can also mean a mode of execution. It is the first syllable in _charity_. None of these facts has any connection with the others.
>
> These are the kinds of litanies I use, to compose myself. (104)

Despite Offred's need for clarity and self-composure, the force of elision is irresistible. Even when she sees things in grossly exaggerated detail--the shell of her breakfast egg like the surface of the moon, the minute and individual hairs in the rope used during the Salvaging ceremony--she cannot establish objects as ultimately separate. Significantly, it is upon the oppressed bodies of Gilead that this slippage most clearly manifests itself. Moira's body suffers a strange displacement; her feet, after her escape attempt, are flayed with steel cables, so that they "did not look like feet at all. . . . They looked like lungs" (87). The face of the executed dissident in the Particicution ceremony has undergone a similar metamorphosis: his beaten face is "swollen and knobby, stubbled with unshaven beard. [It] doesn't look like a face but like an unknown vegetable, a mangled bulb or tuber, something that's grown wrong" (261). Finally, Atwood makes the slippage from subject to object explicit: "He has become an it" (263).

Offred herself feels, as the novel reaches its conclusion, the overwhelming force of "everything [she has] resisted" (268). Once she could use her own narrative as a medium for composing herself as a subject, a medium through which she could distinguish herself. Offred is thus able, through her narrative, to sever the metonymical associations which would connect her, for example, with the paintings she recalls of the bored, sedentary harem women, those "objects not in use" (65). By the novel's penultimate chapter, however, Offred feels "for the first time" the "true power" of Gilead (268), which is at its most basic and brutal level power over her body. The conundrum of the dystopian dialectic is that the body is made inevitably into an object, either by submitting to and internalizing the processes of that objectification or by resisting them. The former is demonstrated in Offred's self-construction as flesh coalesced around the "central object" of her womb (69); the latter, in the brutal metamorphoses of corporal punishment. Assuming she is about to be arrested for sedition, Offred thinks,

> I don't want pain. I don't want to be a dancer, my feet in the air, my head a faceless oblong of white cloth. I don't want to be a doll hung up on the Wall, I don't want to be a wingless angel. I want to keep on living, in any form. I resign my body freely, to the uses of others. They can do what they like with me. I am abject. (268)

Atwood's use of the word "abject" in this passage is the focus of a complex of connotations. I can't help but wonder if she might also have had Julia Kristeva's study of "abjection" ironically in mind. The "abject," as Kristeva defines it in The Powers of Horror, is that which the body expels and which, through the process of expulsion, defines both what is rejected or excreted as "Other" and what remains incorporated as "self." "Defilement," claims Kristeva, "is what is jettisoned from the symbolic system" as well as from the body (65, original emphasis). Abjection therefore establishes both the "I" and the "not-I." It designates the loss of the alien which is rejected but which is also established as alien through the excretory act itself. "The construction of the 'not-me,' as the abject," therefore, "establishes the boundaries of the body which are also the first contours of the subject" (Butler 133). Offred is abject, downcast, resigned; she feels, in short, like shit. Replace the "a" in abject with the pornographic "O" that evokes precisely the resigned body given over to "the uses of others" (Atwood 268) and the dystopian equation is complete.

The politics of the dystopia are the politics of control. Control of subjectivity and objectivity, control of boundaries: who stays whole, who gets shredded. "The Republic of Gilead," promises Aunt Lydia, "knows no bounds," because "Gilead is within you," impressing its boundaries upon you from the inside out. Don't open yourself up, say the Sons of Jacob and the Fathers of Gilead, that's the Lord's prerogative, and your Commander's. Consider the alternatives. We'll replace you, displace you, turn your feet into lungs, you'll be walking on air. If you dare to open yourselves to revolutionary possibilities, we will perform our own surgery on you, cut you to pieces, slash you to ribbons. "Steel yourself" (15). Be intact. The resisting body is a constrained body; open at your own risk.

Walk to the End of the World: The flesh-caged soul

> "The soldiers are coming to get us.
> 'Into the shelters,' they shout. 'Get into the shelters!'
> 'You're letting us into the shelters?'
> 'We'll need you for after,' say the soldiers. 'Why d'you think we've kept you handy?'"
>
> Zoë Fairbairns

Suzy McKee Charnas's Walk to the End of the World further explores the limits of the resisting body as articulated in The Handmaid's Tale. The "fems" of the post-Holocaust Holdfast are even more abject than the women of Gilead; whereas Gilead holds that its women may save their souls, if not their bodies, through successful surrogate motherhood, the Holdfast's fems are held to have no souls to save. Instead they have only a void, a "suture" (MacCannell and Flower MacCannell 210), "the horror," in Luce Irigaray's famous summation of Freud's sexual equation, "of nothing to see" (This Sex 26). Juxtaposed against the substance of male phallic power, the ungenitalled body of the fems exposes female insubstantiality. Like the "public display of privates" at which Offred marvels in The Handmaid's Tale (68), serving among men as a "reassurance," the "flashing of a badge," the fems' black hole proves that in male physiology, at least, "all is in order" (68). Such order is simultaneously confirmed and threatened by the disorderly presence of female sexual absence. The Handmaids' "O" is supplemented, although not filled by, the spiral sign which, in Walk to the End of the World, symbolizes such disorder.[5] Unlike Monique Wittig's women warriors, whose refulgent holes catch the light of the sun, the "fems" of Walk to the End of the World have at their centres the mark of the Moon Witch, the dark nothingness of the void which, according to Holdfast doctrine, absorbs, holds, and magnifies darkness. The true horror of "femmish" physiology lies in the implicit challenge posed by women's impotence, just as the horror of female physiognomy in Freudian doctrine lies in its implied threat of castration. The terrors of the outer universal Void, dreaded by all Holdfast men, who wear hoods to protect themselves from the reason-threatening empty sky and the malignant Moon Witch, are echoed in the Void between the fem's legs. It is a gap that signifies vacancy, disoccupation and, at the same time, an opening onto a nightmare terrain: an annulling nullity, a nothing accommodating annihilating nothingness.

The goal of the entire Holdfast culture is to defend itself from, by defining itself against, this vacancy. While the men ostensibly hold the fems beneath notice, Holdfast life actually revolves strangely around the fem's de-centred and invisible presence. Sarah Lefanu observes that women occupy such a degraded position that "'Fem' is a swear-word in itself: 'Go eat fem-shit' and 'Go stick it up a fem' are typical abusive phrases" (152). The linguistic transformation of the curse "femmish" to "famish" or "famishing" is especially revealing, connoting as it does that persistent sense of both hunger and hollowness that informs so much of the men's attitudes towards the fems. Although these patterns are certainly, as Lefanu argues, measures of femmish devaluation, I would argue that, if a culture's fears and obsessions are reflected in its discourses of profanity, then Holdfast can be read as more fem-centred than it might at first appear. The persistent unease that is the reaction of most men to the fem's songs and their outright fear of the night, the sky, the moon, and femmish "witchery" also betray this. As Captain Kelmz observes, "Most men were entirely too preoccupied with the creatures" (27). In Walk to the End of the World, in fact, Charnas executes a textual reversal of centre and margin that immensely complicates any reading of her narrative: while the "now properly tamed" fems are debarred from Holdfast society, excluded from any participation in it except as slave labourers, pack animals, and "dams," the Holdfast itself is revealed as both literally and metaphorically "built upon the backs of" its fems (159). While congratulating themselves upon the re-conquered world of manly virtue they have established, the men are blind to the fact that their whole culture is in fact founded upon strategies of self-defense and countervalance.

These strategies depend upon the Holdfast's pathological obsession with likeness and difference, an obsession that finds its essential manifestation in the difference between the male and the female body. The horror of female flesh can be contained if females themselves can be bounded within a category, a classification, based on these very disruptive absences. As Dean MacCannell and Juliet Flower MacCannell describe the process of classification as it occurs in our own culture,

> There are three logical forms an opposition can take: A:B, in which objects of two merely different classes are distinguished; +:-, in which objects which are considered to be equal but opposite are opposed; and 1:0, in which objects are classed by the presence or absence of a crucial characteristic. The last form of opposition is called a negation, and it is the form of the original classification, male:female. Males, as a class, do not need to dramatize their sexuality, because they are the only actual sex class. Females are in the other class, not because they possess anything positive, or even negative, of their own; it is only that they are not males, theirs is a residual class: 1:0. (210)

The elaborate memorized lists that form the basis of Holdfast education are one example of this. The men spend frantic energy, in the chanting which precedes the dreaming ceremonies, in defining themselves as not-Unmen. As Bek thinks back to his own education, his

> memory supplied the words: the names and characters of

> the unmen, who were only properly spoken of under the bright noon sun at a dreaming. Having just done the beasts, they were telling the names of the Dirties, those gibbering, nearly mindless hordes. . .: "Reds, Blacks, Browns, Kinks; Gooks, Dagos, Greasers, Chinks; Ragheads, Niggas, Kites, Dinks. . ."
>
> . . . "Lonhairs, Raggles, Bleedingarts; Faggas, Hibbies, Famlies, Kids; Junkies, Skinheads, Collegeists; Ef-eet Iron-mentalists. . . .
>
> Finally, the chant came to the fems, huge-breasted, doused in sweet-stinking waters to mask uglier odors, loud and forever falsely smiling. Their names closed the circle. . . . (112)

That the chants themselves are cyclical and circular is tremendously ironic, since the circle, like the spiral that is the Holdfast's symbolic representation of the Void, exemplifies the (w)hole of female sexual vacuity, the "pornographic O" (Gilbert and Gubar, No Man's 47) signifying nothing, full of nothing.

This female sexual absence is originally and most obviously reflected and (dis)embodied in the text in terms of Alldera's own physical absence. The anomaly of a nominal "heroine" (I use quotation marks to concede the difficulty of discussing either heroes or heroines in a text which effectively deconstructs the concept of heroism in all its forms)[6] who does not appear until page sixty-five has been noted by several critics, including Marlene Barr and Sarah Lefanu; it is probably more significant to note that she does not speak for almost forty pages subsequent to her introduction, her first memorable words being "Please-you-master" (102). Although Marlene Barr has labelled this a "non-feminist narrative structure" ("Utopia" 50), Alldera's delayed appearance is, in fact, at the heart of Charnas's dystopian vision; far from being "non-feminist," the narrative structure forces a confrontation with the text's issues of marginality and indigeneity, making the reader complicit in the invisibility and inconsequentiality of the Holdfast fems. The difficulties of resisting this complicity, or even of being aware of its operations, are demonstrated in critical responses to Walk to the End of the World. Frances Bartkowski, for example, in her otherwise useful chapter on Charnas, describes the novel as a "patrilineal quest" (82) which tells the story of the mythically conventional "prince in search of his father" (83). Sarah Lefanu similarly privileges the male protagonist, characterizing Alldera as "the least memorable character in the book," although she does go on perceptively to suggest that, as such, "perhaps [Alldera] represents the void so feared by the men of the Holdfast, the 'emptiness' on which the patriarchy is constructed" (154). I would state this more strongly: in the Holdfast, Alldera, like all fems, essentially is the Void. The void of her absence for much of the novel, and the void of her silence when she does appear, suggests that Alldera is the material representation of immaterial chaos, bearing on and in her sutured body the external sign of her internal hollowness.

Ironically, the textual gap left by Alldera's physical absence through much of the novel is only intensified by her eventual appearance. Clues dropped about the fems, such as Eykar Bek's brief glimpses of immediately-disguised intelligence beneath Alldera's mask of placid imbecility, and the degree of organization that the renegades discover in the fem training quarters, alert the reader to purposes for Alldera's presence in the text, as for her presence on the men's quest, that extend beyond any proffered explanations. The continued deferral of the revelation of these plots creates the same sense of unease and disruption that informs the journey of Bek, d Layo, and Captain Kelmz in search of Bek's father, de-privileging and finally de-centring their quest. Readerly attention slips laterally, away from the adventures of the two ostensible heroes and towards Alldera as what Roland Barthes might call the hermeneutic enigma, which is "distinguished, suggested, formulated, held in suspense, and finally disclosed" (19). The enigmatic Alldera advances the plot through the questions raised, but never fully answered, by her mute and circumscribed, yet disruptive, presence.

Just as Alldera's physical presence is the site of uncertainty and unsettlement, it is possible for the body itself to be, as Elizabeth Grosz points out, the site of struggle and contention, an insurgent surface that at once receives and re-conceives a text. If the body is a target of social systems of codification and constraint, this suggests that the body exerts a threat to social order, which social order attempts to disarm by intensifying its restraints. The body resists this constraint, Grosz suggests, and offers the possibility of alternate and revolutionary self-inscriptions.[7]

The possibility of a radical reinscription of the body is problematized in Charnas's text, however, by the ways in which the fem's bodies are originally inscribed by Holdfast's patriarchy. Definitional difficulties surround the "not unambiguous" (de Lauretis, Feminist 3) concept of resistance. For most of the Holdfast fems, resistance is defined largely, if not solely, in terms of staying alive; all more active strategies of subversion pale beside "the habits of survival" (162). While the Holdfast men have many social games (all, like the long-forgotten game of "Robert's Rules," originating in patriarchal obsessions with power and domination) played for points, money, and social standing, the fems' game is always and only won by quotidian survival. Thus, in the interests of survival, Alldera values her compact, utilitarian physique over the "merely decorative" (142) bodies of Senior Kendizen's pet fems, who are themselves marked to display both their status and that of their owner. Luce Irigaray states that "Women are marked phallically by their fathers, husbands, procurers. And this branding determines their value in sexual commerce" (This Sex 105). Charnas makes this branding literal in the excoriated hides of the household fems:

> They wore long hair, indicating that their owner was rich enough to scorn selling their scalps to the fur-weavers. And they were covered with markings that could only be tattoos: stripes, spots, even fine striations like the hair of beast-pelts, as if they were beasts instead of fems. (96)

Like the more overtly marked bodies of the pets, however, Alldera's unscarred flesh has always been labelled a public and commercial space; as they decide whether or not to take her on their journey, for example, Bek and d Layo note that, besides being able to speak, Alldera had "one other unusual, visible attribute," the strongly-developed legs and buttocks of the speed-trained runner, which are exposed to the men's gaze when Fossa, one of the Matris, "lift[s] the young one's smock to point this out" (66). The short smock that is the uniform of the fems, and the absence of undergarments, heighten the sexual availability of the fems and keep them physically vulnerable, but, more importantly, as Dean MacCannell and Juliet Flower MacCannell argue about the role of skirts in any culture, they "signify that [women] have nothing to expose, and . . . that men can wear pants and appear thereby to be covering something up" (211). Alldera recognizes, moreover, that the acknowledgement of her genitalia as public property is, considering her own genital Lack, her only tool of survival. When she is physically threatened by a furious Eykar Bek, she falls back, literally, on femmish "habits of survival": "Alldera fell back. She spread her legs and clawed up her smock with both hands in the last, mindless defense: when threatened, present" (161). After her rape, Alldera takes an inventory of her body as if she were a merchant inspecting damaged goods. As Charnas tellingly phrases it, Alldera "took stock":

> . . . one sleeve was half-torn from her smock; a bruise was swelling warmly under the skin of her left temple; there were other aches and abrasions, none serious. . . . A clever fem sometimes needed a reminder of her true position, and there was nothing like a good swift fuck to set firmly in her mind her relation to the masters again: the simplest relation of all, that of an object to the force of those stronger than she. (161-62)

The rape scene is actually prefigured earlier in the text by another instance of Alldera's survival through playing upon the patriarchal inscriptions marked onto her body. Just as the fems at Bayo suddenly all "acquired a slight stoop or cringe," their faces going "slack and foolish" (53) when the men entered the room, Alldera presents to her masters "a face like a round shield of warm metal," expressing "a wilful stupidity that was perfect in its own way" (102). Her face is, however, only problematically protected; it is covered, buffered, impenetrable, a shield that can be an object of defense and defiance. It is also, however, blank and round, a zero, void of intelligence or feeling, and "fathomless" in its ignorance; it affirms even in its deception the voided zero that is the eternal sign of the female in the Holdfast taxonomy. It is extremely telling that, immediately after Eykar Bek sees Alldera's self-representation, he desires "to penetrate [its] burnished smoothness" (102). The phallus, it seems, abhors a vacuum; Bek's immediate response to Alldera's vacancy is an urge to pierce it with "the lance of his keen sight" (102). This brief but central scene becomes a trope for Bek's later actual rape of Alldera; in both, Alldera's strategies of resistance are, as is her body, ambivalently stigmatized.

Ironically, what Alldera feels most strongly after the actual rape is "hollow in body," which, she bitterly reflects, is "fitting for one who was merely a receptacle for the use of men" (162). This hollowness is construed by all men as a natural attribute of all fems, a function of their "inner cores of animating darkness shaped from the void beyond the stars" (55), a darkness they carry, in Holdfast theology, in place of a soul and, in Holdfast philosophy, in place of a penis. Alldera's reflections provide, however, a subversive subtext to her self-chastising recitation of orthodox doctrine, in which "A man's use conferred existence" (162):

even as she feels "hollow in mind, for there was nothing she might imagine, feel or will that a man could not wipe out of existence" (162), the repetition of the word "hollow" emphasizes that Alldera, as empty female vessel, has not been filled by the ejaculating phallus. Moreover, what the phallus apparently has injected is hollowness itself, a shot of seminal darkness, the inner emptiness of "the void of [men's] hidden selves, where any mad chaos was possible" (45). Even Bek uneasily senses some of this as he catechizes Alldera after the rape. Terrified of his own inner emptiness, he projects this terror onto his victim: "'You haven't made a cub off me, have you? . . . Nor stolen my soul,' he said, giving her a shake. 'Is that all there is to it, then?... Then it's nothing!' he cried" (162-63, my emphasis).

Alldera's "last, mindless defense" (161) is an act of resistance in that it enables her to survive, but to survive at the expense of her enforced acquiescence in the patriarchal marking of her body. The bitterness of the lecture that she gives herself about women's place suggests her own fierce ambivalence about the act. This ambivalence is shared by the reader benumbed by the brevity and brutality of the rape scene, and complicated still further by the knowledge, again shared by both Alldera and the reader, that the mission she is supposedly surviving in order to effect is a hoax. She has been sent by the Matris ostensibly to find the mythical Free Fems and enlist their aid in the emancipation of Holdfast, but in reality to return with a false message intending to lull those restive fems agitating for open rebellion into giving up "their plan of suicidal resistance in favor of simple endurance" (147). The heroism of Alldera's secret quest is thus overturned, and any act of resistance she commits in its name becomes increasingly qualified and ambivalent.

"Simple endurance" dictates, as well, the (sub)cultural practices of the Bayo fems' quarters. The body of the fem is, at death, unmistakeably and irreversibly marked in Charnas's nightmare depiction of the Rendery. Significantly, the Rendery is where Alldera is first introduced both to Bek and d Layo and to the text; she emerges silently from the Rendery machine, "a thing that reeks of its own dead" (65). Both men are horrified and sickened when they surmise that the purpose of the machine is to refine the bodies of dead fems into edible food for fems still living; and yet, d Layo concedes, there was a morbid beauty to it:

> Some man must have designed the process; it was too beautiful, too efficient to be a product of the fems' own thinking. The concept of making them literally self-sustaining had a certain gruesome sophistication impossible for fems' thinking. He had to admit, though, that a sort of manly hardness was argued by the ability of fems to accept such an arrangement; unless they were not hardened so much as merely too depraved to be horrified. (64-65)

The beauty d Layo sees is the elegance of a self-sustaining equation, and he is attuned to its harmony because he has been steeped in such an equation, although never in quite so material a form, all his life. The Rendery incarnates the Cartesian formula upon which Holdfast is founded at its most final, cyclical, self-perpetuating level: ashes to ashes, dust to dust, meat to meat.

Walk to the End of the World is clearly interrogative of both the Rendery and the secret fems' culture which it emblematizes. While both enable the fems to survive, even that survival is complicated, in that it seems ultimately to perpetuate unchanged the status quo of the Holdfast. Like the Aunts of The Handmaid's Tale, without whom Gilead could not function, the Matris work for the survival of the race at any cost, including the lives of individual fems.[8] Too often the mass of that effort seems to find itself in the service of the patriarchy. As the old Matri Fossa explains regarding femmish food, in this case the curd-cake made from the processed flesh of dead fems, it is "to give fems strength for the tasks set them by the masters" (60). Like the women taking refuge in the shelters during the "predicted cataclysm" of the Wasting, who "said to one another, let's do what they say for now" (3) in order to ensure individual survival and that of the race, they accept the men's revised history written onto their flesh "with staves and straps" (4); they accept the imprint of male guilt upon their own bodies, and even punish those recalcitrant fems who refuse to do likewise. The final marking of the body thus occurs in a grim cooperation between the matriarchy and patriarchy. The spiral-sign of the Void, given material embodiment by the patriarchy, but maintained and administered by the matriarchy, physically crushes the flesh of the fems. The spiral, an ancient Celtic symbol of female power, is thus estranged or defamiliarized; it is rendered as the death-force rather than as the life-force once signified by the spiral as an iconographic cultural symbol. The "huge screw-shaft" and its "gleaming sharp" screw-thread (62) are the devices of Holdfast's final, fatal rape. The death-dealing representation of the spiral, symbol of the Void, becomes, in the Rendery, mechanized: "wedged into the hollows of its spiral were fragments of flesh, [and] bone" (62). The imperatives of survival begin, in the Rendery, to be overwhelmingly overshadowed by survival's "noxious operation[s]" (64).

The idea of survival as a form of resistance is increasingly deconstructed in the text from the visit to the Rendery onwards. Alldera is increasingly disillusioned with the Matris' exhortations; as she sings the traditional femmish songs to the carry-fems, with their matriarchal "urgings to patience" and their "promises that the men would find their sanity and humanity again in time," Alldera finds that she "could no longer even finish the words" (159). She rejects what she has come to see as "the docile compliance of fems in their own suppression" (159).[9] Alldera finally admits that her actions have committed her to the Pledged, the group of young fems who advocate open and active rebellion at any cost. The Pledged "sang songs of their own, saying that death was better than survival to no other purpose than the production of new generations of fems for a worse oppression than before" (146). When the Matris warn that the men would kill all fems in reprisal, and thus ensure the end of the race, the Pledged reply: "let them" (147).

Like Joanna Russ's controversial novella We Who Are About To, in which a woman marooned on an alien planet kills the rest of her ship's survivors rather than perpetuate the race at debilitating cost, Charnas's text suggests that the line between resistance and complicity is an extremely difficult line to draw. As Alldera concedes in her final conversation with Eykar Bek, survival "is an overrated achievement" (210). In the dystopian economy, even the recalcitrant and resisting body cannot easily, if at all, be self-represented or self-inscribed in alternate or oppositional ways; the only final possibility for female resistance might come, not in re-inscribing, but in abdicating the occupied body.

For the men of the Holdfast, the possibility of the self-marked body as a site of resistance (since the Holdfast is nearly as oppressive for men as it is for women) is differently negated by their peculiar formulation of the traditional mind-body dualism that has informed Western thought since Plato. In this formula, as Simone de Beauvoir and, later, Hélène Cixous describe its simplest equation, "Women are body" (Cixous, "Laugh" 257). In the Holdfast, the body is tabula non rasa; it emerges stinking and corrupt from the female womb, always already marked with the invisible and hence doubly threatening "fem taint" (39). Within the Holdfast's taxonomy of the self, a man's soul is held to be rational, manly, virtuous,

> a fragment of eternal energy that had been split off from the soul of his father and fixed inside his dam's body by the act of intercourse. Being alien to everything that the soul represented, the fem's body surrounded the foreign element with a physical frame, by means of which the soul could be expelled. Seen from that perspective, a man's life could be regarded as the struggle of the flesh-caged soul not to be seduced and extinguished by the meaningless concerns of the brute-body. (102-03)[10]

The convoluted Manicheeism of Holdfast philosophy manages paradoxically to attribute to the fems both the corruptly material and the corruptly immaterial. Both land and ether are wild, untenanted, and ever-encroaching; the men exist in "a lifetime battle with the void-stuff of which the world was made" (115). Because even the male body, as corruptly material, partakes simultaneously of the earth-stuff of matter and the void-stuff of the heavens, it is stranded in the position seen, in Holdfast superstition, as least protected and most threatened: trapped "between the emptiness of sky and land" (25). Sons, "fresh from the bellies of fems, were tainted with the destructiveness which characterized their dams. . . . [but] the Holdfast needed these sons to live long enough to outgrow the fem-taint and join the world of mature men in their turn" (39).

The way to a purged and manly body begins with the stringent discipline of the Boyhouse, where a brutal regimen of discipline inculcates a deep loathing for the boys' carnal origins. Part of this program is based on a crude but effective form of aversion therapy: in the dormitories the boys "live naked to be reminded of how like beasts and Dirties they were" (106), while in the library they are regularly sodomized by the same Teachers whose classroom lectures instruct them in the natural prurience that adheres in the boys' own flesh from their residence in the maternal womb.[11] Grim parallels with the femmish kit pits, where young kits "scrabbled naked in filthy straw for food that the trainers threw down" and where, as in the Boyhouse, "only [the] strong and cunning" survived (164), point to a common interest, not in education but in conditioning, in the breaking and humbling of the flesh. Just as Eykar Bek "no longer believed that the purpose of the Boyhouse was to teach the truths that made men out of boys. . . . [but] was to impose discipline" (106), Alldera recognizes the same drive in the Matris, whose "secret culling" of fem kits kills all but the most docile, and "whose teaching ran secretly alongside the men's training" (146).

Boyhouse education teaches that the chaos and corruption of female flesh can, while it still occupies female flesh, be marked off, penned up, and so contained; when it inhabits, through the unfortunate proximities of birth, the male body, it is most dangerous because least visible. The Holdfast men fight this alien ambush of their bodies on two fronts. First, by insisting upon difference, they create a category of likeness beyond which everything is alien and thus dangerous. Second, they differentiate between increasingly subtle shadings and variations of difference, absorbing these differences as hierarchical social nuances which become institutionalized and can therefore be safely accommodated. As they kill off more and more of what is obviously different, however, and refine and recategorize whatever heterogeneity remains, the alien is increasingly revealed as resident in their own flesh. Once, for example, wars and the Wasting have eliminated all the "Dirties," those whose "skins had been tinted all the colors of the earth so that they were easily distinguishable from true men" (112), suspect qualities of "dirtiness" are less clearly discernible and therefore, as an invisible enemy, infinitely more threatening. Similarly, once all non-human animals have been exterminated, beastliness remains an invisible quality undetected in the mind and soul, even in such paragons as Captain Kelmz, whose secret obsession with beastly Otherness is revealed only through the forbidden revelations of the drug-induced Darkdreams. As the fems' subversive songs reveal, "the men have become all that they hate":

> "Heroes!" the songs mocked. "The unmen are not gone; you are more predictable than the thoughtless beasts, though not as beautiful. You are poorer than the dirties, though less wise. You dream the drug visions of the Freaks, without freedom. You are more vain and jealous than the fems, and weaker." (159)

The "riddle-song" Alldera sings to the carry-fems similarly interrogates notions of difference: "'Why is a raven like a writing-desk?' it began," and continues to evolve "as whimsical and subtle a consideration of the concept of likeness [as] the singer could devise" (141). The riddle, of course, is the one posed by the Mad Hatter at Lewis Carroll's famous tea party, and, in both Walk to the End of the World and Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, it remains notably unanswered.

The more obsessed the men of the Holdfast are with homogeneity, the more they insist upon finer and finer shades of difference, more and more rigid lines of differentiation, lines they demarcate within their own consciousness and, ultimately, in their own flesh. The beast fantasies of Kelmz, the Rover-trainer, are buried deeply in his mind, emerging only under the proscribed auspices of the Darkdream ritual, which exposes the chaotic underside of the heroic, manly soul.

Servan d Layo, the outlawed Darkdreamer, laughs at Kelmz's secret: "What a secret! He should know as many men as I do who dream themselves a coat of fur or feathers when they get the chance!" (46) For the Rovers, the drug-fogged hunters and fighters who live in a perpetual, distorted, heroic daydream, the beast is externally embodied: they hunt in "packs" and "braces"; under their absurd parodies of heroic garb they wear harnesses which are essentially leashes; they walk obediently to the commands of their "trainers," who control them with continual doses of the manna-drug. Haunted by the ghost-forms of the beasts and unmen they have destroyed, the men of Holdfast are blind to the chaotic fear-generated representations they carry in their own flesh, a chaos they combat through the mortification of that flesh. They carve out their resistance to the anarchic, the organic, in the organism itself. They attempt to excise the inherent/inherited mark of the Beast, which is also the mark of the Void, by incising over it the marks of their order, creating a palimpsest of opposing flesh politics, marking the male body as safely social.

The incorporation of the individual into the social body is encoded in the literal tracing of flesh: rank and status is indicated not only by a complex system of colours, badges, and uniforms, but by the tattoos which are engraved into the flesh of male children at their induction into the Boyhouse. These tattoos are material messages that, "read" through the text of the Holdfast's elaborately ritualized social covenant, convey essential and encyclopedic information about the body they inscribe. The purpose of this ceremonial scarring is twofold. Overtly, the tattoos serve primarily as a mark of identification, denoting the bearer's precise position within the Holdfast hierarchy and the Company or work unit to which he is attached. The tattoo is thus a trade marker that becomes a trademark, a brand-name that becomes a literal brand.[12] Identity and rank are cut into the skin, an incision and insignia of social ownership that is, like the governing Board's movement from corporal punishment to "more subtle forms of discipline" (Charnas 34), beyond hiding. The point(s) of Holdfast's elaborate and formalised social contests are concretized as the tally of the social game is scored in flesh. More than this, however, the tattoos perform covertly as emblems of protection which, like the Chants Protective and ritual gestures and signs, ward against the ever-encroaching tide of femmish chaos and disorder.

As with the duel wounds prized in the ferry workers' insular sub-culture, a slippage of signification shifts marks of disfigurement to those of desire. The ferrymen's "private status structure" (34) is dependent upon and derives from the superstructure of rank markings distinguishing all Holdfasters, but allows them, as undistinguished and relatively impotent Juniors, to replicate the public status structure of the powerful and privileged Seniors. While, in the official superstructure,

> work points determined a company's subsistence portion every five-year, and game-points converted into individual shares of spending cash for the Juniors . . . . among themselves the young men vied for standing on the basis of scars (34).

This "system" originated "as a defiant glorification of the marks of corporal punishment," but eventually evolved into "an underground hierarchy" in which it "was rare for a young man not to be marked up, even if he had to inflict wounds on himself" (34, my emphasis). Desire as it is experienced in the Holdfast is inextricably bound up with and bound into power and its manifestations. Just as the red scarf, ostensibly signifying a menstruating fem's uncleanness and sexual unavailability, is transformed into a token of desire for men who find the idea of "a fem's monthly tribute of blood to the Moonwitch" sexually exciting, the marks of violence and pain on male flesh are at once institutionalized and eroticized.

Because power is manifested in the Holdfast through its literal marking of the male and of the female body, both men and women pay for acts of political resistance in flesh currency. The Board's whips, like the "straps and staves" (4) of their ancestors, inscribe lessons of submission onto the backs of rebellious fems; the defiant d Layo has his identity tattoos burned out of his shoulder with acid when he transgresses too completely against Holdfast hierarchy. The Holdfast asserts its own imperviousness against the pregnable and permeable bodies of its citizens and its fems. The smouldering fires that populate the landscape of the Holdfast, emblematizing the smoking, stinking fires in which Holdfast "witches" meet their death, suggest the ultimate friability, materiality, and disposability of the body. The perpetually immanent final conflagration of the flesh holds, in the politics of the dystopia, even the resisting body powerless.

Swastika Night: There's something wrong somewhere

". . . Nothing can be internalized totally and irrevocably; we always have internalized norms from various cultural contexts and contacts. Each internalization of repression contains the possibility of rebellion."

Dale M. Bauer

"But what prison? Where am I cloistered? I see nothing confining me. The prison is within myself and it is I who am its captive. How to go outside?"

Luce Irigaray[13]

Walk to the End of the World and The Handmaid's Tale anatomise, to differing degrees, the disempowerment of the resisting body; in Katharine Burdekin's Swastika Night, even the possibility of resistance is negated. Corporeal agency is denied to women not only, as in Atwood's and Charnas's novels, because the female body is claimed and inscribed by patriarchal social practices, but because women have been entirely evicted from the specular economy that endows their bodies with meaning as objects of male desire. Women may survive, as they do in Walk to the End of the World, when written out of the Oedipal equation, but once women have been written out of the equation of desire, they are finally and fatally displaced. While the Holdfast pretends that it has effected this displacement, using women for reproductive and boys for sexual ends, Charnas makes clear that, whatever official Holdfast policy might suggest, women are still regarded as essentially erotic. The variety and extent of fem-centred "perversions" demonstrates that, for the men of the Holdfast, the fem's powerless and degraded state enhances rather than diminishes that eroticism, which is then projected by the men into and onto the fems' bodies as evidence of femmish "witchery." The displacement of women from the erotic schema in The Handmaid's Tale is equally artificial. Despite the claim that the Handmaids are "for breeding purposes only," not "concubines, geisha girls, [or] courtesans" (128), the flourishing of bordellos, such as "Jezebel's" brothel, shows the eagerness of the Commanders to maintain women, by force if necessary, within the brothel economy.

The patriarchal construction of the black hole of female sexuality gapes wider in Swastika Night than in The Handmaid's Tale or Walk to the End of the World; so widely that it has apparently, as is the fate of black holes, swallowed itself up. Even the dark shadow of that sexuality seems to have vanished, hinted at only in the unease with which the men of Burdekin's Hitlerian Reich avoid even the idea of women as potentially sexual, as opposed to reproductive, beings. The active and profound disgust elicited in men in response to female bodies is more prevalent in Swastika Night than in The Handmaid's Tale or Walk to the End of the World. The very strength of this revulsion, however, seems to suggest its opposite: a sexual desire so strong and unanchored that it manifests itself as nausea. As in the Holdfast, all desire is officially displaced from the bodies of women to the bodies of men, or, more generally, the bodies of boys;[14] the women who are thus displaced, in Swastika Night, simply disappear. The absence of women in the novel punctuates any reading of Swastika Night with moments of profound unease; their elliptic presence is evoked continuously in the process of their conspicuous exclusion. But women do not inhabit the subversive margins of this text, as eagerly as we may search for them there. The problematic politics of resistance elaborated by Atwood and Charnas simply dissolve, in Swastika Night, under any scrutiny. No secret protagonist plots in the Women's Quarters, waiting for her moment to rewrite herself as hero. No secret messages pass along unlikely media. Excluded from the signifying economy, women in Swastika Night simply cease to signify. The grim success of Burdekin's dystopian vision is that she makes it unreasonable, within the terms of her text, to expect anything else.

For all its apparent didacticism and narrative simplicity, Swastika Night consistently complicates a unilateral critical reading. Atwood's use of textual revision and uncertainty subtly undermines the potential of rebellion; in The Handmaid's Tale, as in Orwell's 1984, the identity and authenticity of the "true" revolutionaries are compromised by the deceptive possibilities of the false. In Walk to the End of the World, Alldera's emancipatory mission is riddled with layers of betrayal; the complicity of Alldera's foremothers in their own oppression is reflected in the Matris' active suppression of dissent, in their matriarchal teaching that runs "secretly alongside" (146), not against, patriarchal training. In both novels, the "oppositional strategies" (DuPlessis, Writing 34) of the suppressed are themselves subject to rupture, as patriarchal marking literally and metaphorically bifurcates the female body. A severing of subjectivity is constantly enacted between the spread legs of Offred and Alldera, of fems and Handmaids. Swastika Night posits the product of this surgery: a split subject so self-divided that both parts have atrophied. Burdekin's subject is split, not only along the lines between "unconscious and conscious motivations . . . between physiological processes and social constraints," as Julia Kristeva suggests (Roudiez 6), but also along the more elementary suturing seam through which subjectivity is conferred or, in the case of Swastika Night, denied. This seam has been so successfully unravelled by the patriarchal practises postulated by Burdekin that her German Empire has forfeited not, as Elizabeth Russell suggests, the "Feminine Principle" (15), but something at once more concrete and more amorphous: the bodies and souls of women. Women have atrophied, in Swastika Night, entirely into absence; the genital holes represented by Gilead and the Holdfast have been replaced, here, by the holes left by the positions women no longer fill.

Both the original sanctioned position occupied by women as objects of masculine desire, and the space they occupy once evicted from that position are, in different ways, places of silence and exile. This silence informs Swastika Night so thoroughly that, as a text, it is extraordinarily difficult to write about. All hermeneutic devices tend to become either subject to the constraints of that silence, or overwritten by the sheer bulk of the masculine discursivity from which Burdekin constructs her text.[15] A superficially similar silence in Walk to the End of the World has elicited, as I have previously noted, a great deal of critical unease and resultant commentary; Alldera's delayed entrance and limited speech become, in Charnas's text, a locus of critical activity. In Swastika Night there is an absence of female characters that is much more pronounced and a dearth of speech that is much more profound, and yet critics seem strangely reluctant to address either. Only three women are actually named in the text: Old Marta, who speaks three lines, Alfred's "woman" Ethel, who speaks seventeen lines, and Alfred's infant daughter Edith, who cries. Alldera, by comparison, is something of a chatterbox, and Offred positively garrulous. More compelling, however, is the fact that, unlike Walk to the End of the World and The Handmaid's Tale, Swastika Night never admits us to the consciousness of its women characters, beyond a glimpse into what does not go on in Ethel's mind. The narrative voice, maintaining the distant and neutral tone it adopts throughout the text, forces us to question the nature, even the existence, of that consciousness, which barely seems to exist beyond the most rudimentary awareness. Both Offred and Alldera are able to create, within their consciousness, a subjectivity at least partially distinct from their derogated social roles; for Offred, her inner narrative is a place of self-composition, while Alldera seizes, in hers, the forbidden "I." Ethel, however, is described only externally; the narrator adopts, albeit more sympathetically, the same bestial descriptors used by the officers and citizens of the Empire for their "cattle" (11). When Alfred picks up his daughter, for example, Ethel displays what the narrator describes as "a terribly anxious look in her eyes, like a bitch whose new-born puppies are being handled" (160); she "whimper[s]" (161) as Edith "mew[s]" (163). Ethel is, the narrator asserts, "about as unhappy as a woman could be" (158, my emphasis), a phrasing that suggests limitations even to the capacity of women for suffering; while this passage generates sympathy for Ethel and her predicament, her fear of the loss of both her man and her daughter, she seems to experience even pain and fear in a way that is dulled by her limitations. This is emphasized further in the narrator's claim that, although "she was wretched and she was ill," Ethel "knew it hardly more than an animal would have done" (159).

As much as we may hope for it, we are never presented with any textual evidence qualifying this lack of awareness and affect. Nor are we permitted to see Ethel as somehow unique in this. "None of the women," concludes the narrator,

> found their lives at all extraordinary, they were no more conscious of boredom or imprisonment or humiliation than cows in a field. They were too stupid to be really conscious of anything except physical pain, loss of children, and the queer mass grief which always overtook them in church. (158)

While the narrator's cool neutrality is in contrast in this instance to Alfred's active disgust and agitation, both seem to draw the same conclusions about the women's animal nature. What is absent in all the scenes in the Women's Quarters, an absence that makes Alfred's brief foray into the Women's Quarters one of the most disturbing sections in a text full of disturbances, is what Elizabeth Grosz has called "interiority," or the disembodied, psychic layer that animates the body, that it is "the point of origin of a perspective" and "occupies a conceptual, social and cultural point of view" (Grosz, "Notes" 5). Divorced from any conceptual, social, and cultural context, the women of Swastika Night literally devolve into Ethel's state of bovine blankness.

Faced with this absence, the critical endeavour inevitably becomes a speculative endeavour, takes on a fill-in-the-blanks quality. It is this temptation towards filling in, filling out, filling up of the potentially empty text that makes me tread warily and with foreboding. The "Reduction of Women" enterprise carried out by the noxious von Weid in the pre-history of the text has been bent towards the complete indifferentiation of women; by making individual women indistinguishable, interchangeable, von Weid's programme ensures that all women are smoothed out, smoothed over, become a blank homogenous surface. It is tempting to critically inscribe that surface with authoritative readings of Burdekin; I suspect that to succumb to such an urge moves in the direction of the same oppressive strategies against which Burdekin writes. Even undertaken in good faith, the critical endeavour is likely to become, perhaps inevitably becomes in interaction with such a text, an act of adumbration, overshadowing, obscuring by its own processes both its representations and those of the text.

What is particularly disconcerting about most of the criticism addressing Swastika Night is that the issue of textual absence not only goes uninterrogated, but that this absence is replicated and reproduced in the criticism itself. Elizabeth Russell at least attempts, in "The Loss of the Feminine Principle in Charlotte Haldane's Man's World and Katherine [sic] Burdekin's Swastika Night," to come to terms with this absence, or with its symptoms. She states perceptively at the outset of her article that the women in Swastika Night, as in Haldane's contemporary dystopia Man's World, are "depicted by silence rather than sound," and that she will "attempt to decipher their silence" (15). Although she is the only critic writing on Swastika Night to acknowledge seriously the centrality of this silence to the text, Russell's attempts to "decipher" it seem only to lead deeper into its heart. She approaches Haldane's text, for example, by way of quotations from Haldane's husband, the geneticist J.B.S. Haldane. Russell discusses his essay "Daedalus: or Science and the Future" before we are introduced to Man's World, and encourages us, intentionally or not, to read Haldane's text through that of her husband. Before we are given a single direct quotation from Man's World, in fact, we wade through excerpts not only from Mr. Haldane but from Bertrand Russell and even Leonardo Da Vinci. Russell approaches Burdekin's text in much the same circuitous manner; references to and citations from Jung, Nietzsche, Otto Weininger and Schopenhauer tend to shout down whatever quieter female voices might be waiting to speak, just as the entire text of Swastika Night is given over to the torrents of words from Alfred and the two von Hess Knights.

This silencing is effective even in the context of Russell's clearly feminist undertaking. It takes other forms, as well; never, for example, in her entire article, does Russell mention a female character by name. Further, Russell claims that Burdekin "adopts the voice of Cassandra in warning that 'the pliancy of women is the tragedy of the human race'" (21). In the text, however, these words are spoken by von

Hess, the Nazi Knight who holds the secret, forbidden book of the past and is thus enlightened as to many, but certainly not all, of the lies of his Empire. Von Hess, like his ancestor, the von Hess who authored his book at the beginning of the worldwide burgeoning of Nazi power and the apotheosis of Hitler from a political figure to godhood, attributes to women neither will nor soul. Although he knows, on the evidence of the book and the photograph of the pre-Reduction German girl preserved with it, that women were not always the ugly and stupid beasts into which they have apparently devolved, von Hess still describes them to Alfred, in all sincerity, as merely the "simulacrum" of male desire:

> Women will always be exactly what men want them to be. They have no will, no character, and no soul; they are only a reflection of men. So nothing that they are or can become is ever their fault or their virtue. If men want them to be beautiful they will be beautiful. If men want them to appear to have wills and characters they will develop something that looks like a will and a character though it is really only a sham. If men want them to have an appearance of perfect freedom, even an appearance of masculine power, they will develop a simulacrum of those things. But what men cannot do, have never been able to do, is to stop this blind submission and cause the women to ignore them and disobey them. It's the tragedy of the human race. (70)

It is in *this* context that von Hess asserts that "the pliancy of women is the tragedy of the human race": the words can then hardly be fairly or uncritically attributed to Cassandra or to Burdekin's warning.[16] If anything, they are a warning to be aware that, as Alfred muses in response to von Hess's argument, "There's something wrong somewhere" (82). The fact that von Hess is made the apologist not only for the silenced women of the Hitlerian Empire but, in Russell's exegesis, of Burdekin herself, demonstrates the intricate and insidious nature of this wrong.

The critical silencing of women which echoes and reduplicates the cultural silencing of women in *Swastika Night* is even more overt in the work of Carlo Pagetti than that of Elizabeth Russell. In his article "In the Year of our Lord Hitler 720: Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night*," Pagetti argues persuasively that, in what he calls the "fundamentally male character" of dystopian discourse, women in general are "seen as docile interpreters of the system (Lenina in *Brave New World*) or as ambiguous instruments of rebellion (Julia in *1984*)" (361). He acknowledges, as well, that in *Swastika Night* women are "not even allowed to rise to the dignity of being a character in the fiction" (361). So far, so good. Despite this promising start, however, Pagetti seems unable to allow women to rise to the dignity of being characters in his criticism; unlike Russell, he does at least give names to the women, but this concession is qualified by his apparently uncritical reference, for example, to Edith as a "creature" (367), echoing the terminology of von Weid's Reduction and of von Hess's homilies on the animalistic nature of femininity. While describing von Hess's book as "a partial reconstruction, filled with lacunae" (364), Pagetti is seemingly unaware of the extent to which women are themselves lacunae both in the text and in his article. He overwrites the blank textual surface of woman with repeated addresses to and appeals to "humanity," a term which, as feminist criticism has been at pains to point out, diminishes women to merely a member or subset of a larger and more important group, while simultaneously excluding them from full participatory membership in that group. Burdekin's "history," Pagetti claims, "does not seem able to forgive the errors of humanity" (367). Burdekin's "doleful compassion," which is, we are informed, "the subtle answer of the woman writer" to oppression (as differentiated from, I suppose, doleful acrimony or, worse, doleful stridency), is her "most complete re-affirmation of a principle of humanity" (367). Swastika Night itself is, we are further told, a call for the end of the "Night of the Swastika" in favour of "the dawn of a redeemed humanity" (367). This repetitive use of exclusive language, reflected still further in Pagetti's assertion that Alfred's "'fantastically upside-down state of mind'" is the only condition in which "man can set in motion an authentically utopian process" (367, my emphasis), echoes in a rather chillingly unselfconscious manner the exclusivity of Hitlerdom's rigid systems of rank, power, and hierarchy.

Pagetti's reading of Burdekin's pivotal narration concerning the forbidden photograph is also unsettling. Along with the secret book which has been passed down from one generation of von Hesses to another, and which von Hess has proposed now to pass on to Alfred, there is preserved a photograph that, together with the book, comprises the last evidence of pre-Hitlerian culture. The snapshot, as Daphne Patai observes, "at one stroke undoes the two central tenets of Hitlerism" ("Despair" 86): that Hitler was not born of woman and was never in the defiling presence of a woman, and that women were always the dull animals which the Reduction has made of them. It does more than this, however: the immediate reaction of Alfred and Hermann when shown the photograph establishes the body of the pre-Reduction woman, the only material alternative presented in the text to the devolved post-Reduction woman, as a pornographic space. The photo rivets the attention of the men originally in that it defies the traditional image of Hitler, represented in "innumerable statues and pictures," as of "colossal height, long thick golden hair, a great manly golden beard spreading over his chest, deep sea-blue eyes, the noble rugged brow--and all the rest" (66). The Hitler in the photo is short, paunchy, and unprepossessing, with "ignoble soft features" (67); he is overshadowed by the boy beside him who

> had more of the holy German physique than either the Lord Hitler or the two [officers] behind. He had great thick long plaits of hair so light that it must have been yellow falling forward over his shoulders and down over his chest, a noble open forehead, large blue or light grey eyes, a square jaw and a wide mouth open in a half smile, just showing big strong white front teeth. He was dressed rather like a Knight's son at his First Blood Communion at fourteen, but the pale robe of this centuries-dead boy came down to little below his knees. His carriage was upright and graceful without being stiff. He looked, to Hermann's staring, protruding eyes, more noble, more German, more manly, despite his youth, than the small dark soft-looking Lord Hitler. (67)

When this handsome youth is revealed as a girl, "What they had not before seen . . . became plain to them. Under the folds of the soft short robe were full round feminine breasts. 'A girl! ' Alfred breathed softly" (68).

I will return to this passage at some length later, because it is especially revealing for a reading of what I believe Burdekin is suggesting about the erasure of the female body in Swastika Night. Pagetti's response to the photograph, meanwhile, is instructive. While Pagetti asserts, correctly, that the utopian process "does not consist simply of a return to the world of the photo of the German girl next to Hitler--that is, to the domestic vision of women common in the '30's"

(367), his own treatment of the photo as iconographic weakens this disclaimer, especially when he follows it immediately with the wistful assertion that "nonetheless, something of the dream evoked by the photo remains" (367). Pagetti asserts, as well, that women's awareness of "a female dignity and pride which should not accept 'men's idea of their inferiority'" is "impossible to manifest during the Night of the Swastika but [is] retrievable from the past through the photo of Hitler and the German girl" (366, my emphasis). I have two arguments with this. First, the woman in the photograph is not a representation, as Pagetti suggests, of domestic woman; if the passage itself fails to make clear that this "lovely German girl" (68) is presented as an image of erotic delectation, Hermann's and Alfred's reactions upon viewing the photo confirm it. The full-breasted, half-smiling, blue-eyed blonde in virginal white, who "basked in the sunshine of the God's [Hitler's] favour" (67) while gazing "not at him, but straight at the camera" is an almost archetypal figure of desire production. Pagetti's labelling of this phenomenon as a "dream" is correct, but it is a very different dream than the dream of the domestic women about which Pagetti speculates. Without much effort, for example, we could insert this image into the category of pornographic representations of women (cheerleader, streetwalker, schoolgirl, Playboy bunny) found in the brothel in The Handmaid's Tale. Second, Burdekin makes clear that no matter what "dignity and pride" might have been the heritage of the pre-Reduction woman, that pride is not internal but external, awarded by men as a prize for achieving the ideals they value, the ideals embodied in the German girl (beauty, youth, virginity, availability) and corrupted by the conviction that even these qualities can only be, in von Hess's words, "a sham" (70).

Particularly disturbing in Pagetti's analysis is his unwillingness to extrapolate from the repressively misogynistic tenets of fascism to the repressively misogynistic social practises inherent even in non-fascist ideology. Pagetti asserts that it is "the complete triumph of totalitarian ideology that expresses the maximum degree of violence against women" (361); he overlooks, however, the fact that, as Alfred explains, this violence can be traced back long before the rise of the Hitlerian religion, the historical Nazi party, or party politics of any sort, can be traced back, in fact, to "the real tribal darkness before history began" (107). Pagetti states that

> Along the historical precipice leading to the year 720 After Hitler, women have been driven away from the home and shut up in concentration camps, which are veritable state brothels where they are systematically raped, impregnated, and soon thereafter deprived of their infant sons. A sick universe engenders the madness of a nightmare, which nonetheless is used to strip away the political fictions of the present in much the same way

> that, behind the noble face of the charismatic leader, the brutal sneer of the rapist is revealed. (362)

What Pagetti does not acknowledge in this summation is that "the political fictions of the present" include the fiction that rape and Reduction only occur in a totalitarian context. Pagetti claims instead that "the degradation of sexual relations is the final stage of a more general decline of civilization" (362, my emphasis). This degradation, however, is not part of a general disintegration and collapse as Pagetti suggests, not merely symptomatic, but an integral and causal element in the decline. Pagetti's refusal to see male violence and "the degradation of sexual relation" (362) as generalized and institutionalized narrows the parameters of Burdekin's novel to those of an anti-fascist tract, and allows for a sense of complacency and self-congratulation that violates the integrity of her text.

Daphne Patai addresses this potential for violation in her criticism. She states in her Introduction to Swastika Night that "fascism is not qualitatively but only quantitatively different from the everyday reality of male violence" (iv). Patai's argument counters Pagetti's central location of male violence in totalitarian ideology with her claim that Swastika Night "transcends the specifics of Nazi ideology and its location of Naziism, and militarism in general, within the broader spectrum of the 'cult of masculinity'" ("Introduction" vii). Barbara Ehrenreich, discussing the intersection of gender, violence, and fascism, makes a similar point; the importance of trying to comprehend fascism and the violence implicit in it is not that it is "out there" as a phenomenon that can be isolated and studied but that it is "already implicit in the daily relationship of men and women," in

> the man who feels a "normal" level of violence toward women (as in, "I'd like to fuck her to death") . . . the man who has a "normal" distaste for sticky, unseen "feminine functions" . . . the man who loves women, as "normal" men do, but sees a castrating horror in every expression of female anger . . . or that entirely normal, middle-class citizen who simply prefers that women be *absent* from the public life of work, decisions, war. (xv)

Although I think that these ideas are essential to an understanding of *Swastika Night*, and to a reading that does not limit or trivialize Burdekin's text, the point to which Patai's remarks lead me also lead me to disagree with her conclusions. In an article comparing *Swastika Night* with George Orwell's *1984*, Patai observes that both novels are "about the interactions of men," and that while Orwell's text is naive and uncritical in this, Burdekin "addresses this issue [as part of] her exposé of the cult of masculinity" ("Despair" 87). By adopting the "dominant masculine narrative strategy of focusing on males, Burdekin is able to analyze their beliefs, to show the gradations of ideological mystifications by which the different men in the novel are held captive" ("Despair" 89-90). Patai concludes that, because Burdekin theorizes gender as cultural rather than natural, Swastika Night is essentially optimistic, and that "Burdekin's hope" is linked to her "awareness . . . of gender roles and sexual polarization" ("Despair" 87).[17] While it is true that Burdekin is ahead of her time in her theorizing of "femininity" as socially and culturally constructed, this apprehension, far from providing an enabling means of resistance for the devolved women of the German Empire, merely confirms their oppression. The terms upon which Burdekin constructs her dystopia disable both the deconstruction and the reconstruction, in a less oppressive way, of gender, since the Empire has effectively destroyed all external referents, all the "internalized norms from various cultures and contacts" which, as Dale Bauer contends, make change possible (xii). Patai concludes that "the tendency to see women as animals did not need to be invented, did not require an ideological jump. It was already there, as it had been for thousands of years, and merely required extension" (94). Patai does not acknowledge that, by implication, this "tendency" which is so strongly entrenched that it has survived for "thousands of years" can, without check, extend just as far into the future as into the past.

The second element of "Burdekin's hope" is, according to

Patai, expressed in her enabling of the reader to hope "that knowledge will somehow survive, that the secret book will be passed on, that a girlchild may be raised with a smattering of pride" ("Despair" 87). But Patai's own earlier explication of the institutionalized oppressions of the "cult of masculinity" and the widespread ideological base of male violence undermines even such a tenuously phrased and contingent hope. The secret book is problematic as an emancipatory text; not only it is filled with gaps and inaccuracies, but it is an artifact steeped in the fears, hatreds, and misapprehensions of its own time and culture. Like the Hitler Bible, the only other surviving text aside from a few technical manuals, von Hess's book is based on assumptions about the essential inferiority of females, assumptions that are made all the more ironic by the fact that the original von Hess was writing before the Reduction of Women, when women could "read, write, make books, music, pictures, houses (all inferior to men's, of course), be lawyers, doctors, governors, solders, [and] fly aeroplanes" (109), yet in all this were seen as merely moulding themselves, in order to please men, to a "masculine pattern" (110). The fact that von Hess's book is available only to, and can be preserved only by, the privileged male, a man of a caste high enough to be educated and exempt from the sudden searches imposed on commoners, reinforces it as a text of imperialist privilege, and therefore as not easily bent to emancipatory projects. Further, it is impossible to overlook the irony of a secret salvific text, hidden away for years at great cost, in a world which is, as Burdekin is at pains to point out, almost entirely illiterate. This irony is compounded in that von Hess's manuscript is written in German rather than in Alfred's mother tongue. On the contrary, Burdekin makes clear again and again that this script is clearly a paternal one, defended and inherited in a patrilinear line, part of an initiation rite in which the text becomes a bond cementing the filial to the patriarchal. The list of signatures in the back of the book testifies to the self-inscription of each new generation of males into the patriarchal line. The oath taken to protect the manuscript is similarly a ritual of induction:

> "I swear to be faithful and guard this book. Arnold von Hess, Knecht."
>
> Under there was a list of names in various handwritings, preceded by the words Und Ich. The Knight turned over the page and the names went on. The von Hess men were nearly all called after one of the old scribe's four sons. . . .
>
> "And do you swear to be faithful, Alfred?"
>
> "Yes."
>
> "Then take this pen, dip it in this special ink in this bottle here, and write your name under here." (89)

If Burdekin's hope, therefore, rests on either the book or the men sworn to defend it, it is at best a qualified and ironic hope. Even as a sympathetic protagonist, working his way towards enlightenment against tremendous cultural odds, Alfred is presented problematically as a hero. More accurately, the whole concept of the heroic is problematized. Alfred's role as "Hero," for one thing, is heavily overdetermined. He is frequently explicitly linked to the legendary hero, the "great English Leader called Alfred, who had a huge statue in Winchester," and whose descendent, also called Alfred, "is to deliver England from the Germans" (30). Alfred, like Bek and d Layo in Walk to the End of the World, undergoes the classic hero's quest, journeying into the underworld and returning with secret knowledge with which, potentially, to redeem his people. And although he attempts to defy the Hitlerian "soldierly and heroic virtues" of violence, brutality, and ruthlessness (6), Alfred ends up dying violently in a savage fight precipitated by his own act of violence. This paradox is reflected in his phrasing of his pacifist principles; "the force idea," Alfred thinks, must be "smashed" (165).

Taken together, the Hero and the Book are iconic figures representing the whole of the patriarchy. In Swastika Night, then, the only hope for women's escape from patriarchal oppression is guarded in the hands of, and can only be realized and employed by, the representatives of the patriarchy. This makes for a tenuous hope at best. Alfred's final cry, as, dying, he passes the sacred trust on to his son, young Alfred, is "Nothing--to be--done. Must be left. In time--" (195-96). This "in time" has been consistently read as a token of Burdekin's optimism, or at least as mitigation of the text's pessimism. The "Nothing to be done" that precedes it is generally overlooked, though the phrase is reiterated by Alfred several times throughout Swastika Night, both before and after he comes into possession of the book. Even once he has formulated to his own satisfaction the causes of the wretched state of women, Alfred is unable to see any way of changing their circumstances. When Alfred first holds his infant daughter Edith, for example, he thinks:

> if I took this baby away from Ethel and from all other women and never let her see a man or a boy and brought her up by myself, and taught her to respect herself more than she respected me, I could turn her into a real woman. Something utterly strange. Beautiful, perhaps, like the Nazi girl, but something more than just being beautiful. I could make a new kind of human being, one there's never been before. She might love me. I might love her. . . . This little thing could be made into a woman, but it will grow up exactly like Ethel. (160-61)

At the futility of these thoughts, however, he soon sinks into a "black despondency" (163), a despondency similarly present at Alfred's deathbed scene. The phrase "in time" is disrupted by the dash that follows it; the dash itself stands in for the supremely disrupting moment of Alfred's death. Patai interprets that dash as extending forward into the future, ready to puncture, presumably, what she has earlier called the "stasis" of the German Empire ("Despair" 86). It is true that the evocation of the future can be a revolutionary tactic in itself, an articulation of the possibility of a different reality engendered by the act of articulation. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis confirms in Writing Beyond the Ending, "raising the issue of the future" can "challenge that pleasurable illusion of stasis" found in the "closure of historical movement" at a novel's end (178). The chronotope of Swastika Night, however, does not allow for the projection of an unsullied future. It allows only for the always already contaminated nostalgia for a utopian past that has never existed.

The book and the photograph comprise the last remaining evidence of this past. Both make clear, not how free, but how circumscribed women's lives were. This sort of qualified nostalgia is repeatedly interrogated in The Handmaid's Tale; when Offred thinks back, for example, to the "almost weightless" freedom of her former life (23), this freedom is repeatedly qualified by other memories of the ever-present possibilities of assault and abuse. Nevertheless, Offred remembers with longing "how we used to think, as if everything were available to us, as if there were no contingencies, no boundaries; as if we were free to shape and re-shape forever the ever-expanding perimeters of our lives" (213). Perhaps it is cynical to suspect that it is this double-edged memory, rather than a utopian future, that Luce Irigaray has in mind when she speaks of "a world for women themselves. Which has both never existed and at the same time is already there, repressed, latent, potential" (qtd.in Whitford 169).

The dystopian present, in which women have been excised from the text, replicates the dystopian past, in which women have been excised from all but their narrow spheres of biological and sexual usefulness. Von Hess's book chronicles how women were, at the inception of the Hitlerian Empire, gradually driven out of any other part of life. Von Weid's theories about the soulless, animal nature of women gained credence because, as von Hess describes it,

> the lunatic vanity of the Germans was concentrated really in the males among them. The women hadn't beaten the world and made the Empire. They had only borne the children, and that was no more than any English woman or Russian woman could do. And these proud soldiers, the great-grandsons of the men who really made the Empire, were beginning to feel very strongly that it was beneath the dignity of a German man to have to risk rejection by a mere woman. . . . They wanted all women to be at their will like the women of a conquered nation. So in reality the Reduction of women was not started by von Weid. (81)

This passage is echoed alarmingly in the documents cited by Klaus Theweleit in Male Fantasies, his study of the German Freikorps. Theweleit quotes from a novel by Freikorps officer

Thor Goote:

> How can women understand us, when they gave nothing, when they shared nothing of our experience during those years of torment? . . . We soldiers are in the habit of respecting only those who have stood their ground under fire. That is why many of us inwardly turn away from women, even when outwardly we can't do without them. (61-62)

Women, Theweleit observes, "have nothing to do with the 'state'" (62). They are "on a par with members of colonized races" (62-63), an equivalence which von Hess also draws. But, Theweleit admonishes, Goote's explanation "should be treated with caution. These men's resistance to women may have been confirmed by the war, but it was hardly created by the war" (62). Theweleit traces the roots of this resistance more deeply:

> As a matter of course, fascism excluded women from the public arena and the realms of male production. But fascism added a further oppression to the oppression of women: When a fascist male went into combat against erotic, "flowing," nonsubjugated women, he was also fighting his own unconscious desiring-production. (434)

The successful colonization of "erotic, 'flowing,' nonsubjugated women" is complete in Swastika Night. Once an "ambivalently desired object" (Patai, "Despair" 94), women have been so successfully degraded that they are neither desired nor desirable.[18] The photograph of the pre-Reduction German girl, then, is not only the last remaining evidence of the past, it is the last evidence of the specular economy from which women have been removed. The reaction of Alfred and Hermann to the photo shows how easily that economy can be restored. Neither has ever experienced a culture in which women are seen as erotic objects; in fact, they are seen as objects of revulsion, and all aesthetic and sexual desire has been displaced onto men and boys. The response of both Alfred and Hermann to the photo when they think the figure it portrays is male is merely admiring interest; when they realize it is female they become immediately aroused. If they had not noticed the girl's breasts before, however, they make up for their inattention once their misapprehension about the figure's gender is corrected:

> Alfred grew pale and Hermann very red. The Knight watched the younger men with great sympathy. He was too old to care now, but many a time when his blood was warmer had he got out his secret photograph to look at the face of that lovely German girl. (68)

Since the fact that the photograph is forbidden and must be enjoyed in secrecy equates von Hess's confession with the masturbatory experience of a young boy reading a contraband copy of Playboy, it is difficult to believe that it is solely the girl's face that has warmed the younger von Hess's blood. In fact, Burdekin shows a movement of attention that shifts radically depending upon the perceived sex of the figure; the focus is almost entirely on the face and expression of the young "boy," while it immediately moves to the body of the girl, to her height, breasts and "carriage" (68). There is little ambivalence in Alfred's and Hermann's desire for this object. The potency of their reaction is intensified when it is compared to their response to women as they are within the fictional present of Swastika Night. Hermann has no sons, despite the state mandate that he breed them, because he cannot bear congress of any sort with women, while even the sympathetic Alfred "could not stay with a woman except to satisfy his natural needs" (161-62) and finds that the Women's Quarters "has the atmosphere of a stinking bog, heavy and evil and sickening" (165).[19]

Once exiled from the specular economy, there is literally no place, no space, for women to exist. As in Walk to the End of the World and The Handmaid's Tale, the women in Swastika Night have been exiled to the corners of the text as to the corners of the community; they live in special quarters, in perpetual quarantine. The glimpses Atwood and Charnas allow us into their women's spaces, however, reveal small signs of covert resistance. Offred finds an ironic manifesto scratched into the floorboards of her closet, and attempts to decode the message embroidered on her pillow. Lavatories host secret meetings, exchanges of information, and even the good Wife intrigues in her garden. The fem's quarters, too, are managed by hierarchies and policies never suspected by the Holdfast men; there are secret rooms and, in the Master's house, secrets below stairs. When we at last enter the Women's Quarters in Swastika Night, however, all we find is a submission so profound and so pervasive that we feel, like Alfred, only the overpowering need to escape. Ethel is a blank; she is silent, barely visible, and even her misery is described only in terms of weakness and dullness. In Swastika Night, as in Walk to the End of the World, women live by a rule of silence; significantly, however, when Bek and d Layo invade the fem's quarters in Walk they are addressed precipitately by Fossa, an infraction which astonishes the men and earns her a blow, but which proves her capable not only of breaking the rules but of imagining the possibility of breaking them. Ethel is incapable, even under the urgings of the newly enlightened Alfred, of any such imagination: "When Ethel saw Alfred she got up weakly, bowed before him, and began to move towards the door of one of the inner rooms. She would not speak unless he did" (158). Like the dank miasma, "heavy and evil and sickening" overhanging the Women's Quarters (165), this terrible silence hovers oppressively over the text.

It becomes impossible, therefore, to discuss women's bodies in Swastika Night in the way it is possible to discuss them in The Handmaid's Tale and Walk to the End of the World. In ceasing to exist as objects of desire women's bodies have ceased to signify altogether. It is possible only to discuss the echoes of their signification. Alfred anticipates Joanna Russ's often-quoted statement that "there are plenty of images of women in science fiction. There are hardly any women" ("Image" 91) in his own more brutal formulation: There are no "women," he concludes, there is only "a sort of 'mess.'" (107). No existing paradigm for women in the dystopian past or present is therefore adequate.

Monique Wittig's emancipated warrior women in _Les Guérillères_ tell women, "there was a time when you were not a slave." Remember that, they urge: "You say there are no words to describe this time, you say it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent" (89). _The Handmaid's Tale_, _Walk to the End of the World_, and _Swastika Night_ challenge such a utopian admonition, however, by inscribing the site of resistance within a body that is subdued to and subsumed by the dystopian cultural order. Corporeal agency is restrained as the resisting body is constrained, and the intumescence of resistance is drained by the brutal corporal punishments of the dystopian economy.

Notes to Chapter Two

1.I use quotation marks around "Offred" to indicate my unease with an uncritical critical use of the name--which, of course, is not a name at all. To refer to "Offred" only by the name of her Commander too easily replicates the silencing strategy of the Gileadan regime in the same way that the speaker of the novel's "Historical Notes" replicates it. For the sake of convenience and textual clarity I will drop the quotation marks in further references, but please let them hover in your mind throughout.

2.The several months over which the action of The Handmaid's Tale takes place are ironically conflated in the Table of Contents; periods of daytime activity are punctuated with seven sections of "Night," suggesting the telescoping of time into an ironically inverted week of creation: one that begins with night rather than day, and that ironically parallels the creation account in Genesis. And on the seventh day, apparently, God said "Let there be Academic Conferences."

3.The constant segregation and imprisonment of the Handmaids suggests the necessity of quarantine, reflecting the pathologizing of women's bodies which is reinforced in the Aunts' deep concern for hygiene. Women are seen as repositories of uncleanness, of a cancerous and wildly proliferating sexuality which must always be kept in check. At the same time, women are construed as empty. This is not as contradictory as is might appear, since this amorphous carnality is perceived as devouring, in the same way that cancer cells are devouring; in the absence of anything else, it will consume itself.

4.Atwood also explores the trope of the bloody forbidden chamber in her short story "Bluebeard's Egg," in her short fiction collection of the same name.

5.See Barbara Walker's Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets for a discussion on the symbolic significance of the spiral as a symbol for women's power, especially reproductive power.

6.Bek and d Layo's journey, almost parodically classical in form, reads like a chapter of Joseph Campbell with footnotes from Oedipus. The heroic code is repeatedly challenged: the Rovers with their costumes that seem to suggest a cross between a gladiator and Superman, the recitative Chants with their ironically and darkly comic readings and misreadings of the pre-Holocaust world, the drug-induced "soul-strengthening" heroic visions which put entire towns to sleep. It is impossible, however, to simplify Alldera into an Amazonian or liberating heroine; even her name seems to bear echoes of the faint and ironic mockery Charnas directs towards all incarnations of the heroic, especially since Alldera sees herself not as all daring but, unjustly, as something of a coward: "Let this man, not much taller or heavier than herself and wounded besides, only raise his hand to her and all her courage disappeared into the habits of survival like a rock into a swamp" (162). Walk offers no easy substitution of a female for a male heroic code; while the quest model remains unavailable to women, providing no critical or fictional paradigm for the female hero, the female hero can exist only problematically. For a similarly deconstructive reading of the classical heroic code, see Sheri S. Tepper's account, in Raising the Stones, of the intersections of institutionalized patriarchal religion with the individualist heroic quest.

7.See Elizabeth Grosz's "Notes Towards a Corporeal Feminism" and "Inscriptions and Body-Maps: Representations and the Corporeal."

8.In The Handmaid's Tale," Aunts have the hope of individual power, but this power is always limited and circumscribed by Gilead's government. While the behaviour of both the Aunts and the Matris is destructive and often deliberately cruel, the Aunts seem somehow more abhorrent, since the end of their behaviour is personal power rather than racial survival. The Aunts' complicity is also, however, a survival tactic, and my judgement of it is tempered somewhat by the knowledge that as post-menopausal, non-childbearing women, they are, in Gilead, eminently disposable. Making themselves indispensable as supporters of the Gileadan power structure is therefore a gesture equivalent to Alldera's sexual submissiveness to Bek.

9.Charnas examines the intertwined issues of survival and complicity further in Motherlines, in which Alldera herself faces censure from some of the Riding Women, who see her as compromised or complicit because she survived for as long as she did in the Holdfast.

10.The distrust of and loathing for what Eykar Bek calls "the body-brute" finds echoes and parallels in many veins of speculative fiction, most recently and most overtly in the Cyberpunk movement.

11.While female "kits" were delivered unassisted in the fems' birthing rooms, male "cubs" are "chopped out" by "Hospital men" (174) in antiseptic facilities, presumably to begin immediately countering the denigrating effects of the birth process.

12. The Holdfast culture, aptly named after the "anchoring tendril" of mutant seaweed that "clings to the rocks against the pull of the current" (4), clings tenaciously to the traces of pre-Holocaust civilisation that have survived the Wasting; the shreds that remain are grounded in the venerated but little understood totems and tokens of what Charnas calls the culture of masculinity. Thus the Companies that comprise the backbone of the Holdfast social order, groups of men who live

and work together, are named for the lost but still magically potent signifiers of twentieth-century masculinity: the Trukkers, the Armicors, the Quarterbacks, even the Hemmaways.

13.From Irigaray's Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre (1979), this is cited and translated by Margaret Whitford in Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine.

14.In all three of these novels, the power differential stemming from unequal positions in the strictly regimented social hierarchy is exposed as an aphrodisiac in both homosexual and heterosexual, licit and illicit relations. Force is the preferred erotic mode. Note, for example, Hermann's response to the beautiful blond choirboy at the beginning of Swastika Night: "What hair! Down to his waist nearly. Hermann wanted to wind his hands in it and give a good tug, pulling the boy's head backwards. Not to hurt him much, just to make him mind" (8).

15.The almost entirely discursive plot of Swastika Night adds a new element to Charnas's perception of the simultaneous centrality and fragility of the body as an instrument of resistance; the text or logos is seen as equally central, equally fragile, and equally problematic. The flames of the witch-burning pyres, of rioters' bonfires, and the final flames of the fall of 'Troi in the last pages of Walk to the End of the World are already ashes by the opening of Swastika

Night; they have consumed not rebellious flesh but rebellious words. The fires of holocaust have burned their way through Germany and the colonies of its victorious international Empire, destroying photographs, paintings, statues, but especially books. The written word is testimony to history and to truth; while the discursive format employed by Burdekin foregrounds this, it simultaneously challenges it. Swastika Night is constructed, as Carlo Pagetti observes, "from the testimony of other imaginary texts" (367); these texts are punctuated, however, not just with textual lacunae, but with falsehood. The texts of the Hitler Bible, of von Weid's book, of von Hess's book, and of Swastika Night all tell their own stories, all assert their own supremacy, and all contradict each other.

16.Russell's use of Cassandra as a trope is eloquent but, I think, inappropriate. Although Swastika Night itself might, in hindsight, be read as a prophetic text, Cassandra does not haunt even the margins of this particular text. If any classical ghost lingers there it is the shade of Echo, invisible, volitionless, condemned to repeat endlessly the asseverations of those whose authority she once defied.

17.This assertion of the essential hopefulness of Burdekin's text is reiterated approvingly in the criticism of Russell, Pagetti and Sarah Lefanu, who all cite similar passages from Patai's work, which was the first critical study done on

Burdekin (Barr, "Introduction" 84). My reading of Swastika Night is, unfortunately, much less optimistic than that of these scholars.

18.The institutionalized rape in Swastika Night, and the angelic choirboy's attempted rape of the young Christian girl, have nothing to do with desire. They have everything to do with power.

19.Alfred's violent sense of disgust in the women's quarters emanates at least in part from Alfred's recognition of male guilt over the maltreatment of women; nonetheless, the language Alfred uses to express his discomfort is instructive.

Chapter III
Dirty Politics: The Compromised Body

"Oh, teacher, what will save the world?"

Joanna Russ

The survival of the silenced body is possible; the triumph of the silenced body is not. In The Handmaid's Tale, Walk to the End of the World, and Swastika Night, as my first chapter outlined, the problematics of resistance are illustrated in patriarchal ownership of the heteronomous female body; possibilities of and for opposition are defused and ultimately negated through the complete displacement and dissolution of the female subject. The "compromised body" that is the subject of this chapter is the focus of a different complex of ideas, none of them allowing for a statement as unequivocal as the one with which I began this paragraph. "Compromise" suggests many things: concession, accommodation, arbitration; a mutual coming to terms; a negotiation of boundaries. It implies both change and stasis: the alteration of the alterable, the acceptance, gracious or reluctant, of the immutable. Compromise hints at a walking of fine lines, of journeys honourable or dishonourable. To "have compromised" is to have successfully negotiated--but also to be bound by those negotiations. To "be compromised," on the other hand, is to be suspect, impure, to have made a concession that is disreputable or dangerous. To be a compromised body is therefore to be the site of all this multivalence, and more. The compromised body is not a closed system, virgin, hermetically sealed, defined by an unbroken integument of flesh or ideology. The compromised body may be partially but never entirely infibulated by the dystopian clasp of culture. Neither, however, is this body open to infinite possibility; on the contrary, it is often trapped in space or time. The compromised body is never an open-and-shut case. It is, instead, riddled: with holes, with wounds, with mixed intentions, with contradiction.

The body politic may likewise be (in) a state of ambiguity. Like the compromised physical body, it can be the locus of deception and dispersal, of uneasy alliances, of irresolution. Joanna Russ's now-classic 1975 feminist text The Female Man and Sheri S. Tepper's more recent The Gate to Women's Country (1988) explore the gaps and correspondences between the physical body and the political body, those strange bedfellows conjoined in the dirty politics of survival. Like all such intimate exchanges, this conjugality is fraught with possibilities both potentially fecund and potentially fatal. As with any bodies in such intimate proximity, as well, issues of borders and boundaries, of interpenetrability and impermeability inevitably arise. The titles of both texts foreground the liminality, confusion, and contradiction of compromise, the rigidity of borders and their permeability, the possibilities for transgression and intrusion.

Russ's title, for example, creates boundaries only in order to explode them: the ineradicable lines between male and female, man and woman are invoked only to be redeployed and realigned. "Female" and "Man" are adjectivally appended to one body; do the words lose or gain meaning in such a conjunction? "Man" is compromised by "female" as "female" is compromised by "man"; the body of the Female Man is itself a de-constructive site of meaning which, like the "no man's land" dividing Manland and Womanland in Jael's alternate future Earth, is littered with the rubble of collapsed discourses. Further, this is not "a" but "the" Female Man, the article establishing him/her or her/him or it as singular, extraordinary, phenomenal. This uniqueness and singularity is challenged in the text, however, by the multiplicity and multivocality of the several narrative selves around whom Russ structures her polyphonic text. To be a woman is, Russ demonstrates, to be isolated and fragmented, to slide unanchored from one artificial polarity to another, to be

> mirror and honeypot, servant and judge, the terrible Rhadamanthus for whom [a man] must perform but whose judgment is not human and whose services are at anyone's command, the vagina dentata and the stuffed teddy-bear he gets if he passes the test. This is until you're forty-five, ladies, after which you vanish into thin air like the smile of the Cheshire cat. (134)

Since, as Simone de Beauvoir has observed, and as Russ would agree, one is not born a woman, the process of becoming a woman is the process, in Russ's interpretation, of the inscription of irreconcilable differences upon the body and soul of the oxymoronic female subject. The oppositional and oxymoronic construction of the self-created Female Man is embodied in one of Russ's many sets of narrative instructions, each equally contradictory and unfeasible. "To resolve contrarieties," as one narrative voice asserts, you must "unite them in your own person" (138). Attempting a reconciliation of the irreconcilable can be, however, an explosive business: like taking "in your bare right hand," as Russ's narrator Joanna observes, "one naked, severed end of a high-tension wire" (138). To complete the metamorphosis, we are instructed, "Take the other [end] in your left hand. Stand in a puddle. (Don't worry about letting go; you can't.) Electricity favors the prepared mind" (138).

While the fusion of "female" and "man" that creates the Female Man might imply, as Judith Spector claims, "an insistence that, when human sexuality is discussed, the conversation should include women's sexuality--not merely sexuality as men define it" ("Functions" 202), there is more at play than this insistence. "Fusion" is a highly charged term, and, in an explosive exchange of vowels, it evokes its own opposite, fission. The Female Man is thus the product and sign of amalgamation, but also of separation and annihilation.

In an interview, Russ once described her writing technique as "piezoelectric," or generating electricity by applying pressure (McCaffery 183). This description seems particularly apt in the case of The Female Man. As an explosive text, Russ's work operates, Samuel R. Delany argues, "at the highest level of rhetorical risk," creating a textual space that is half laboratory and half garden, "at once Edenic and Newtonian, regalvanized by honesty and irony" ("Orders" 99). Like the electrically roused creation of Dr. Frankenstein, one of the many monsters visibly and invisibly haunting Russ's text, the Female Man is the product of culture shock.

The title of Tepper's The Gate to Women's Country is less obviously paradoxical than that of The Female Man, yet it too suggests implicit confusions and contradictions. Like Russ's title, as well, Tepper's shows its concern with thresholds, boundaries, and liminality. These concerns centre on the geography--physical and metaphysical--of Women's Country. Representations of territory, of occupation, and of possession emerge, as they do in The Female Man, in The Gate to Women's Country. The physical bodies of the women inhabiting Russ's textual landscape are subject to constant invasions; with the exception of Janet Evason (and then only while she remains safely on Whileaway) they exist constantly in a state of seige. Tepper maps this concern with incursion and occupation onto the template of community. Like The Handmaid's Tale and, to a lesser degree, Walk to the End of the World, The Gate to

Women's Country explores boundaries and borders, foregrounding issues of community, centrality, and marginality. Like the supposedly safe domestic space of the Commander's kitchen, or the sequestered rooms of the Fems' training quarters at Bayo, the interiors of the enclosed, walled, garrisoned cities of Women's Country are directed and maintained by women; the military garrisons surrounding and "protecting" the cities, however, raise serious questions about that centrality. As Virginia Woolf speculates in A Room of One's Own, it is not always entirely clear whether it is better to be locked in or locked out. The textual misdirection so crucial to the development of the plot, however, disallows an unequivocal answer to such a speculation, by disallowing or redefining the question's terms. Tepper highlights, as do Atwood, Charnas, and Burdekin, the polarities of inclusion versus exclusion, interiors versus exteriors, acceptance versus exile, but she re-organizes these polarities in order to undermine hierarchy even while she questions whether any social organization can function without hierarchy in some form.

The communities portrayed by Tepper and Russ are also more complex in their representations of social dynamics than are those of The Handmaid's Tale, Walk to the End of the World, and Swastika Night, which represent straightforwardly oppressive hierarchies that operate on more simplistic and consistent principles. The religious and military codes that support the establishments of Gilead, the Holdfast, and the

Hitlerian Empire are not only readily apparent and transparent, they are essentially interchangeable. The brutal subjugation of the Handmaids, fems and breeding women is replaced, in The Gate to Women's Country and The Female Man, with a more puzzling and problematic devolution of power. In The Female Man, this is demonstrated by the interlocutionary nature of the four parallel worlds which are inhabited by the novel's four protagonists and which themselves occupy four different times/probabilities/continua (22). Like the characters and moralities of Janet, Jeannine, Joanna and Jael, the societies of Whileaway, America-of-the-"real"-present, America-of-the-alternate-present, and the war zones of Manland/Womanland interrogate, challenge and re-contextualize each other. Similarly, in The Gate to Women's Country, the textual and tectonic re-alignment of maps and margins mirrors the perceptual shifts that redesign the mysteriously permeable borders of Women's County. This slipperiness in time, space, and geography creates the textual and social arena as undefined, shifting, and ambiguous. The textual and social spaces of The Female Man and The Gate to Women's Country therefore provide an appropriate forum for an examination of the compromised physical, as well as political, body.

The cosmoscape of speculative fiction has always been peopled (or, more accurately, populated) with the compromised bodies of women. The female body, human or alien, has generically and graphically been the locus of various kinds of radical intervention. Women's bodies have been invaded, disassembled, rebuilt and reconstituted in multiplicitous ways throughout the history of speculative fiction, their flesh and its representations plastic, exploitable, and expendable.[1] In "The Brass Brassiere: Sexual Bimorphism in Science Fiction Illustration," Marilyn R. Mumford points out that, according to the cover art and illustrations published in pulp science fiction magazines, men and women are traditionally portrayed as physically different species. Such illustrations depict a sexual bimorphism which focuses on and exaggerates the differences between the male and female body rather than their similarities. The wasp-waisted, huge-eyed heroines gracing pulp covers (whose mammary glands, as author Spider Robinson once remarked at a colloquium on the female character in SF, defy all known laws of physics, let alone of gravity)[2] are in fact closer in form to the entomological aliens, with their segmented bodies and bug-eyes, than to human males.

The tradition of the modified body most clearly emerges, in speculative fiction, with Mary Shelley's "figuratively feminine" monster (Newman 87),[3] the animated pastiche of a body pieced together from stolen scraps. It continues, in what Beverly Friend calls its "Women as Gadgets (Or Gadgets as Women)" form ("Virgin" 141), through Lester del Rey's 1938 creation of a monster of his own, "Helen O'Loy," the aluminum wonder, perfect wife and "living doll" (Gubar 22).[4] In 1973, Robert Heinlein's computer Minerva, in Time Enough for Love, clones herself an ideal body in order to seduce the man she adores (or, failing that, any convenient male substitute) and, like Helen O'Loy, renounces the glories of immortality for those of heterosexuality. Even more than lascivious female aliens,[5] it seems, compliant female dream-machines such as Minerva and Helen compensate for the sexual frigidity and unavailability that has traditionally characterized the "good" human women in speculative fiction, and for the devalued, because indiscriminate, sexual availability of the "bad." The machines' inherent and preprogrammed submissiveness cancels out the eternal threat of sexual refusal or resistance. Like Charnas's fems and Atwood's Handmaids, themselves modified not through mechanical or biochemical procedures but through the equally powerful procedures of acculturation and conditioning, these women can never just say no. Unlike the fems and Handmaids, however, they can never even think no. Perhaps, in this, they are most akin to the devolved breeding women of Swastika Night, who cannot conceive of anything other than absolute acquiescence.

Although they share the same fictional tradition, these modified bodies are distinct from the compromised bodies with which I am here concerned. Generally, the modified body is altered from the outside and usually not with the consent or even necessarily the knowledge of the woman/machine/object. Frankenstein's nameless monster and the unfortunately named Helen O'Loy came into being through their inventors' driven desire to procreate. And although technically it is the computer Minerva who longs to be a real woman and who grows in vitro the body she wants to inhabit, Minerva is, after all, a machine, and as such cannot experience original desires but only those allowed or adumbrated by the programmes built into "her" by "her" (male) designers.

Recent cyberpunk novels, however, such as those by William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, and Pat Cadigan, and cyberpunk's generic predecessors such as Kate Wilhelm,[6] give examples of female bodies that have been compromised by choice. Gibson's "Molly Mirrorshades," with her implanted ocular lenses, retractable steel claws, and various electronic enhancements, typifies cyberpunk self-modification. While Joan Gordon and others have argued that these kinds of modifications can be empowering for women, I am suspicious of any form of bodily compromise that purports, as Gordon claims of cybernetic changes, to make a body somehow less gendered. Such modifications can turn a woman, Gordon claims, into a soldier, not in her own cause but in "the human army" (198). Molly is, Gordon claims, "simply a human being in women's clothing," committing the "feminist act" of entering "the human army as an average soldier" (198). What remains unexamined is the nature of such an army, such a soldier. How can there be a "human" army when the ontological concept of "humanity" is so problematized in relation to gender? Cyberpunk literature is notorious for its lack of aliens or creatures from outer space; the enemy is never "out there," always within. If an army is defined by its enemies, against whom does the human army fight? Can there be such a thing as a Universal Soldier? Joanna Russ would say no, that no woman can serve the cause of what Gordon blithely calls "the human condition," because no such condition exists (201).

Cyberpunk's relation to the flesh is ambivalent. In the cyberpunk hi-tech megapolitan future, the body becomes a plastic canvas upon which disaffected urbanites inscribe their protracted debates upon their own subjectivity: hence the extensive surgical modifications that are a feature of the cyber-body. The body also mediates between the organic and the inorganic; even "jacking in" to the computer matrix in order to abandon the body requires a body as terminal. But the cyberpunk body works towards its own ultimate dispensability: consciousness can be kept alive without it; intelligence can exist independent of it; the "soul" can be merged into an immortal and incorporeal computer intelligence. The body is, as Case calls it in William Gibson's prototypical cyberpunk novel Neuromancer, "meat." Its malleability does not change its essential nature. The body must be left behind in order to enter the privileged space of cyberspace. In its severing of the physical from the intellectual, the debased life of the body from the exalted life of the mind, cyberpunk fiction reaffirms the Platonic dualities of flesh and spirit, but replaces spirit with the artificial intelligence of the supercomputer. Candas Jane Dorsey crystalizes the essential cyberpunk question in the opening passage to her short story "(Learning About) Machine Sex": "A naked woman working at a computer. Which attracts you most?" (69).

The compromised bodies I will examine in The Female Man and the Gate to Women's Country are concerned with a different question. They are concerned not with the supremacy or subordination of the body to the machine, but with the survival of the body in a dystopian culture. The compromises portrayed in these two novels concern the intricate and costly negotiations of the body for its own survival.

The Female Man: Scandal in the realm of form

"One must choose, then, between satisfaction of the external and of the internal senses. Trying to satisfy them all leads to that scandal in the realm of form known as madness."

Tzvetan Todorov

"We are a nation of metamorphs."

Margaret Atwood

In "A Female Man? The 'Medusan' Humor of Joanna Russ," Natalie M. Rosinsky suggests reading The Female Man as "a model of the ways in which feminist humor can operate within a literary text"; such humour offers, through its ironic, satiric, and parodic structures, "the 'revolutionary potential'" necessary to deflate and revalue patriarchal order (31). Rosinsky borrows, by way of B. Ruby Rich, Cixous's description of subversive feminist humour as "Medusan"; she asserts, as Cixous does in "The Laugh of the Medusa," the power of the feminist text to "blow up the law, to break up the 'truth' with laughter" (qtd. in Rosinsky 31). By concentrating on the "life-giving, not life-denying" nature of such humour (31), however, Rosinsky misses an opportunity to discuss Russ in the light of those other, earlier implications of the word "medusan," implications which seem peculiarly appropriate to The Female Man as a text that is, like the gorgon, alien, potent, alluring, destructive, and irresistibly monstrous. Instead, Rosinsky observes that, by "shocking us into a recognition of the absurdity of patriarchal law and so-called truth, Russ's humor enables the reader to distance herself from unexamined experience or belief, to become a healthy renegade" (32, my emphasis).

Rosinsky's term is immensely provocative, resonant, and puzzling. Particularly in relation to the text of The Female Man, a "healthy renegade" suggests a series of tropes and paradigms that go far beyond those modes of humour which Rosinsky discusses in her brief article. Its evocation of simultaneous models of physical and social health, individual and societal revolution, implies not just the coexistence but the overlap, correspondence, possibly even codependence, of these models. This comes more sharply into focus if we read "health," for example, as "wholeness." While Russ's fragmented narrative technique is clearly part of her message as well as her medium, it comes repeatedly into conflict with readerly expectations of, and desire for, wholeness and unity over dissociation and fragmentation. Judith Spector, for example, while addressing key issues of the monstrous in "Dr. Jekyll and Mrs. Hyde: Gender-Related Conflict in the Science Fiction of Joanna Russ," sees the text as moving towards an ultimate resolution where, if "the duality of the men's world versus the women's world" still engages in a perpetual "dialectical clash," at least the "fragments of self" may "confront one another to understand different needs and perspectives, and, ultimately, to integrate" (375). Spector cites, as an example, the final scene of The Female Man in which the narrative personae bid each other farewell before sending the text itself, in grand literary tradition, as an envoi into the world:

> We got up and paid our quintuple bill; then we went out into the street. I said goodbye and went off with Laur, I, Janet; I also watched them go, I, Joanna; moreover I went off to show Jael the city, I Jeannine, I Jael, I myself.
>
> Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye. (Russ 212)

This scene speaks more strongly of dispersal, however, than of integration. The "I" of "I myself" may, it is true, present a new voice, collectively composed; nonetheless, the "I"s (or the "J"s) separate even as they integrate, going off in different combinations to different destinations. This is typical of the narrative movement of The Female Man: the speaking selves repeatedly conflate, merge, splinter and separate. They are constituted not merely of Charnas's proscribed "magic pronoun" I, but of less solid and less singular fragments.

The drive for unification appears, therefore, to be more critical than textual. Rosinsky, for example, while praising the "different humorous sensibility" of Whileaway because it accepts contradictions and contrarieties, and "acknowledges and revels in the uncertain multiplicity of existence" (32), also insists on a reading of The Female Man which privileges (or perhaps invents) "its unity as an aesthetic whole" (31). Delany speaks of something similar, a "peculiar embarrassment" created by Russ's work ("Orders" 95) which he locates in a "critical nostalgia for presence (a never fully present, always retreating, always already undefinable, yet arguably valuable, significant, and privileged, but finally unwritable meaning)." The desire for "presence" is, Delany claims, "the symptom of the critical failure (not the textual one) that contours this embarrassment" (100). If meaning, as it is traditionally defined, is dependent upon textual unities, always latent within a text, ready to be discovered and elaborated (but not invented) by the reader, then this embarrassment is rooted in the troubling perception of its absence in Russ's work; the critical nostalgia of which Delany speaks is thus nostalgia for the textual wholeness and resolution which Russ persistently denies her readers.

Sarah Lefanu, in contrast to Rosinsky and Spector, does allow for a much more open-ended reading of The Female Man, one that does not superimpose an artificial unity upon the text but, rather, acknowledges the idea of unity itself as an artifice; she recognizes that

> Russ's view is not a holistic one: her concern is not to construct a "whole" or consistent self, but instead to deconstruct, to pick apart, to open up. There is no "real" J which the others express parts of, just as there is no "real" world which others parody or satirise. The desire the reader may have for Joanna's world to be ours (it is contemporary and she does share a name with the author) is disallowed by the author who recreates herself as a prickly fictional character. (191)

Donna Haraway similarly rejects as artifice any "natural matrix of unity," claiming that "no construction is whole" ("Manifesto" 199). Like Lefanu, Haraway does not privilege any narrative self over another, not even the authoritatively-named Joanna who, by sharing the author's name, represents a constant ironic gauntlet in the face of the intentional fallacy. As "four versions of one genotype," Haraway notes, the narrators "even taken together do not make a whole, resolve the dilemmas of violent moral action, nor remove the growing scandal of gender" ("Manifesto" 220).

This acceptance of irresolution and fragmentation is extended, in Veronica Hollinger's "Feminist Science Fiction: Breaking Up the Subject," to break up the larger subject of feminist speculative fiction as Russ breaks up, on a smaller scale, the narrative subject. Earlier "waves" of feminism, like most evolving social movements, emphasized unanimity and solidarity over individuality, an emphasis reflected in much contemporary feminist utopian writing; the "rejection of community" in these fictions, Annette Keinhorst claims, is therefore "generally seen as deeply problematic, if not criminal," and solipsistic or individualistic behaviours are "perceived as a weakening of the feminist movement's unanimity" (94). The movement from "feminism" to "feminisms," however, allows for a dissolution of those critical practises which insist on reading this body of work "as a unified undertaking" (Hollinger 229). By abandoning these totalizing practices, Hollinger is able to distinguish instead a "kind of doubleness in feminist science fiction, demonstrated not only in individual texts . . . but a doubleness also in the body of texts which make up feminist science fiction as a whole" (230-31). This doubleness is generated, Hollinger maintains, in the "contradictory tension between building up and tearing down, whether of individual subjectivities, coherent narrative structures, or entire cultural ideologies"

(231). Certainly this tension informs Russ's work: Whileaway, for example, is both constructed and deconstructed, simultaneously given a vivid and detailed fictional life and fictionalized as utopian dream. Inhabited by citizens who violate essentialist conventions of femininity and yet live in a state of womanly beatitude, Whileaway is as contradictory and compelling as Janet, its ambassador,

> whom we don't believe in and whom we deride, but who is in secret our saviour from utter despair, who appears Heaven-high in our dreams with a mountain under each arm and the ocean in her pocket, Janet who comes from the place where the labia of sky and horizon kiss each other so that Whileawayans call it The Door and know that all legendary things come therefrom. Radiant as the day, the Might-be of our dreams, living as she does in a blessedness none of us will ever know, she is nonetheless Everywoman. (212-13)

And yet this doubleness (of earth and ether, of the individual and the archetypal, of dream and reality) is broken up even further, subdivided until it gives way to more and more fragmentation, a textual structure that, in The Female Man, is more polylogic than dialogic.

Hollinger, perhaps inadvertently, suggests an ideal metaphor for this more multi-dimensional fragmentation when she describes re-evaluating what she "thought was a unified body of texts involved in a unified political project" that "fell apart into many texts and many projects" ("Breaking Up" 233). It was only when Hollinger

> stopped trying to put Humpty Dumpty together again, to halt the play of signifiers, as it were, in order to recuperate a previously well-structured field, that [she] was able to see some of the differences which are intrinsic, and necessarily so, to feminist science fiction. (233)

Humpty Dumpty's broken shell offers a perfect metaphor for Russ's de-centralizing narrative ploys; they create a subject that is, in the words of Teresa de Lauretis, "not so much divided as contradicted," not so much split as shattered ("Technologies" 2). Amid the constant textual tension, central to both The Female Man and The Gate to Women's Country, between insides and outsides, the visible and the hidden, not all the queen's horses nor all the queen's acumen are sufficient to put the shattered subject together again. Haraway's cyborg unities, however, might make a start--not at repairing and regluing old ideas of solidarity, but at unplugging the "leaky distinction[s]" between human and animal, organism and machine, physical and nonphysical ("Manifesto" 193). Far from being obsessed with health as wholeness, the cyborg is "resolutely committed to partiality" ("Manifesto" 192). The compromised body of the cyborg sits on the fence, straddling the walls of supposed polarities, partaking of many elements, as full of contradictory matter as an egg is full of meat. If cyborg writing must not be, as Haraway admonishes, "about the Fall" (217), Eve's or Humpty's, apple's or egg's, then perhaps it must be about the great balancing act not falling, of keeping the pieces together, about the centrifugal force of narrative which holds parts, if not in unity, at least in contiguity.

Whileaway is itself, we are told, "the inside of everything else" (95). And, in this utopian interior, the irreparably shattered shell of Humpty Dumpty gives way to the integrated circuits of the body and the machine, the crone and the computer. Whileaway's industry is founded upon the discovery of the induction helmet, which allows heavy physical work to be done by guiding machinery with muscular and neural impulses; finally, in old age, the women "join with" the computers "via induction" (51). The Whileawayan elder

> has learned to join with calculating machines in a state they say can't be described but is most like a sneeze that never comes off. It is the old who are given the sedentary jobs. . . . In the libraries old hands come out from under the induction helmets and give you the reproductions of the books you want; old feet twinkle beneath the computer shelves, hanging down like Humpty Dumpty's. . . . (53)

Whileaway demands new definitions of health and wholeness. If Earth-bound patriarchy prevents the recovery of a mythical, prelapsarian unity, Whileawayan reality has found a new kind of unity by abandoning distinctions and categories in favour of new combinations and permutations. The shattering of boundaries is disruptive, a disruption necessary to recombinant technologies. Thus Joanna, visiting Whileaway in her role as the "spirit of the author," describes "watching the shadows dance on [the] wrinkled face" of an "old, old woman," and understands "why other women speak with awe of seeing the withered legs dangling from the shell of a computer housing: Humpty Dumptess on her way to the ultimate Inside of things" (100). All the "natural" distinctions between sexes, species, and organisms condense into this distinction between outside and inside, into the final boundary between the internal and the external. And then even that boundary collapses, until inside is outside and, as Russ writes in an earlier novel, "Outside is Inside" (Chaos 182).[7]

If the shattered shell suggests the individual and textual fragmentation that is the narrative foundation of The Female Man, then the shattered mirror signifies Russ's disintegration of cultural images and representations of women. Like all of Russ's metaphors, the mirror shifts and twists in its significations; perhaps this is why, while several critics have consciously or unconsciously echoed Russ's textual preoccupation with mirrors, this preoccupation has never been a source of actual critical analysis. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, for example, notes in "The Feminist Apologues of Lessing, Piercy, and Russ" that the warrior Jael is "the mirror recognition of women's murderous rage at the glib, patronizing, and equally murderous patterns of the socially acceptable relations between men and women" (7). Frances Bartkowski observes that in The Female Man "the political is subtly drawn out of the personal" through "an array of self-images evolved in the hall of mirrors which masculinist, heterosexist society offers to women" (54). And Sarah Lefanu claims that Russ's subversive use of the "classic SF paradox of time travel" results in "a mirror-like multiplication of selves" as possible alternate words likewise multiply (189). It is true that Russ uses mirrors in her text in all three ways, as a source of recognition, reflection, and proliferation. It is also, predictably, more complicated than any of these three taken singly. Russ uses mirrors as both barrier and gateway, as the cold, impermeable surface that traps women in a glass cage of their own reflections, and as a dimensional doorway that offers a window onto other worlds, other selves.

Patriarchal culture uses the mirror as a trap to enmesh women in images of what they ought to be. Jeannine Dadier, for example, the woman from an alternative but recognizable Earth with an alternative history in which the Great Depression never ended, is the narrator who has the least to say for herself. Jeannine almost never uses the first-person pronoun, but narrates herself into existence with the prose of women's magazines and romance novels: "There was something *about her*," Jeannine thinks to/of herself in a constant internal monologue, "*There was something unforgettable about her*. . . . *Somebody lovely has just passed by* (109). The idealized, romanticized "her" overwrites and overpowers the "I" who is the suppressed, renegade part of Jeannine, the "I" who doesn't want to get married, who is deeply desiring although uncertain of what she desires, who connects through the natural rather than through the domestic. This is the inner self who is able to say "I," to value her tenuous and besieged independence: "I have my cat, I have my room," thinks this Jeannine, in an inner voice that speaks seditiously beneath the constant acquiesence to lover and family, "I have my hot plate and my window and the ailanthus tree" (3). This is also the self with whom Jeannine is convinced there is something deeply, irreparably, wrong. Jeannine sees herself only, if imperfectly, in the mirror of these social texts, which are mirrored back to her by her family; she longs to see herself completely through the reflecting eyes of her long-awaited romantic hero: "*If only* (she thinks) *he'll come and show me to myself* (109). Without this ultimate mirror, Jeannine, a different narrative voice muses, "is not available to Jeannine" (109).

Similarly, the first time the contradictions of trying to exist as both a woman and a human being force the narrator Joanna to spontaneously metamorphose into a Female Man, the results of her transformation, though invisible, are confirmed by a mirror:

> I turned into a man. . . . You would not have noticed anything, had you been there. . . . I sat in a Los Angeles cocktail party with the bad baroque furniture all around, having turned into a man. I saw myself between the dirty-white scrolls of the mirror and the results were indubitable: I was a man. But what then is manhood? (20)

The "dirty white scrolls" that hold her image between them are the embodiment of the logos that has defined manhood and womanhood, masculinity and femininity, since scrolls and stone tablets were first passed down from one patriarch to another.

The scrolled mirror represents the cultural reflection of gender in The Female Man; however, culture and nature are not opposed, in this text, as simple dualities. Just as cultural myths of gender are exploded in the novel, so the "natural" is graphically and conclusively exploded. The site of these detonations is that playground and battlefield of Nature and Culture, the female body. Russ's Female Man is the ultimate and ultimately compromised body: she/he/it has learned that "there is one and only one way to possess that in which we are defective, and therefore that we need, and therefore that we want. Become it" (139). Like Mary Shelley's progeny, the Female Man is, as Hollinger points out, one of the monsters who "represent the breakdown of conventional ways of being-in-the-world" and who "raise questions about what it means to be both female and human" ("Introduction" 133). The voice of the Female Man, however, does not construct itself as monstrous. Ironically, in fact, the process of "turn[ing] into a woman" is represented as a process infinitely more grotesque, infinitely more unnatural, than that of turning into a man:

> I'll tell you how I turned into a man.
>
> First I had to turn into a woman.
>
> For a long time I have been neuter, not a woman at all but One Of The Boys, because if you walk into a gathering of men, professionally or otherwise, you might as well be wearing a sandwich board that says: LOOK! I HAVE TITS! . . . If you get good at being One Of The Boys it goes away. Of course there's a certain disembodiment involved, but the sandwich board goes. . . . (133, my emphasis)

In her 1980 novel On Strike Against God, Russ's awareness of the "disembodiment" involved in this sinister metamorphosis is reiterated. Although On Strike is a non-speculative or "realistic" novel, the language and tone are frequently strikingly similar to those adopted in The Female Man, especially in the following passage, in which the narrator futilely attempts to locate herself on a cultural grid of gender:

> I'm not a woman. Never, never. Never was, never will be. I'm a something-else. My breasts are a something-

> else's breasts. My (really rather spiffy) behind is a something-else's behind. . . . I have a something-else's uterus, and a clitoris (which is not a woman's because nobody ever mentioned it while I was growing up). . . . This something-else has wormed its way into a university teaching job by a series of impersonations which never fail to amaze me. . . . It smiles pleasantly when it's called an honorary male. It hums a tune when it's told that it thinks like a man. If I ever deliver from between my smooth, slightly marbled something-else's thighs a daughter, that daughter will be a something-else until unspeakable people (like my parents--or yours) get hold of it. I might even do bad things to it myself. . . . They got to my mother and made her a woman, but they won't get me. (18-19)

The product of this process, the woman who has been "gotten" and "gotten to," is ultimately far more monstrous than is the anomalous Female Man. The effectively socialized woman reads herself, when demonized by her own proscribed anger, as nightmare. Unlike Sylvia Plath's red-haired "Lady Lazarus," with her rejuvenating flesh that bears the marks of monstrosity that "will vanish in a day" (37), Russ's revenant does not "consume men gracefully with [her] fire-like red hair or [her] poisoned kiss" (135). This vampire refuses to be romanticized, resists being turned into a demon lover, and insists instead on her freedom to be, as Jael gleefully describes herself, "a sick woman, a madwoman, a ball-breaker, a man-eater":

> I crack their joints with these filthy ghoul's claws and standing on one foot like a de-clawed cat, rake at your feeble efforts to save yourselves with my taloned hinder feet: my matted hair, my filthy skin, my big flat plaques of green bloody teeth. I don't think my body would sell anything. I don't think I would be good to look at. O of all diseases self-hate is the worst and I don't mean for the one who suffers it! (135)

The process of "turn[ing] into a man" is altogether "slower and less dramatic" (137) than that of turning into a woman. It is a process, like Offred's in The Handmaid's Tale, of self-composition. In The Female Man, Joanna composes herself as male, and therefore experiences apotheosis, a coming into man's state and man's estate:

> If we are all Mankind, it follows to my interested and righteous and rightnow [sic] very bright and beady little eyes, that I too am a Man and not at all a Woman, for honestly now, whoever heard of Java Woman and existential Woman and the values of Western Woman and scientific Woman and alienated nineteenth-century Woman and all the rest . . . I think I am a Man; I think you had better call me a Man; I think you will write about me as a Man from now on and speak of me as a Man and treat me as a Man and recognize child-rearing as a Man's business; you

> will think of me as a Man and treat me as Man until it enters your muddled, terrified, preposterous, nine-tenths-fake, loveless, paper-machier-bull-moose head that I am a man. (And you are a woman.) That's the whole secret. (140)

Behind such a claim are questions of subjectivity and identity. If "I" is always male, then "you" (or the "not-I") is always inevitably female. The construction of the self in opposition to the alien Other is epitomized in the gender-transformations of the Female Man: if "I am a man," the Female Man asserts, then "you," of necessity, must be a woman. But in becoming the transformed and reconstituted "I," the female body pays a shocking price: the mutation occurs, not accidentally, through an explosive discharge.

The possibility of resistance is diluted both by the nature of power and its devolutions, and by the product of that power, the body that is compromised, contradicted, self-divided. Where power is illegitimate or totalitarian, as Ross Chambers asserts, "there are no options in response that are not tinged by the nature of that power" (xv). Oppositionality, therefore, is inevitably complicitous, while "violence repeats the methods of power in overcoming it" (Chambers xv). This difficulty is embodied in different forms in each of the three narrators who speak out of the three dystopias, none of whom is able to achieve a pure or uncompromised resistance, but each of whom are impaled on one or the other horn of the dilemma articulated by Chambers. Joanna, for example, the narrator from "our" late twentieth-century America, spends most of her life seeking acceptance in the male establishment by accumulating the tokens of status it values, only to find that these tokens are stripped of their value by the fact of her womanhood. "I thought that surely when I had acquired my Ph.D.," Joanna thinks, "and my professorship and my tennis medal and my engineer's contract and my ten thousand a year and my full-time housekeeper and the respect of my colleagues, when I had grown strong, tall, and beautiful, when my I.Q. shot past 200, when I had genius" (133-34), then the "sandwich board" declaring her femininity could be removed (134). Instead she is told, as a compliment, that she is "a man with a woman's face. . . . a woman with a man's mind" (134). Jeannine, in contrast, seeks a sense of power not through turning into a man but through allying herself and her femininity with the natural, magical world; she

> knows that men--in spite of everything--have no contact with or understanding of the insides of things. That's a realm that's denied them. Women's magic, women's intuition rule here, the subtle deftness forbidden to the clumsier sex. Jeannine is on very good terms with her ailanthus tree. (108)

This is, as Angela Carter observes in The Sadeian Woman, "a most self-enhancing notion," one that mythically and mystically equates "woman to the passive receptivity of the soil, to the richness and fecundity of the earth" (8). The images offered by such an equation, "such as wind beating down corn, rain driving against bending trees, towers falling," are seductive, as

> tributes to the freedom and strength of the roving, fecundating, irresistible male principle and the heavy, downward, equally irresistible gravity of the receptive soil. The soil that is, good heavens, myself. . . . Any woman may manage, in luxurious self-deceit, to feel herself for a little while one with great, creating nature, fertile, open, pulsing, anonymous and so forth. In doing so, she loses herself completely and loses her partner also. (Carter 8)

While seductive and self-enhancing, however, this equation is also, as Russ is at pains to point out, used to bring women, often literally, to their knees. In the anti-feminist role-reversal fantasies Russ examines in "Amor Vincit Foeminam [sic]," for example, the monstrously inhuman and inefficient gynocracy, in the person of its representative woman, is inevitably felled, always by some kind of phallic display such as flashing, a kiss, or, most frequently, rape. No matter how brutal or demeaning this display, the victim falls in love with her attacker and is won effortlessly to his cause. Here is one of the many such conversions these texts supply in glorious detail; I have chosen this example, from

Storm Constantine's The Monstrous Regiment, because its author is (if biographical blurbs are to be trusted) a woman, and one who, judging by her dedication of the novel to her father in hopes that his "misogynistic view of female writers" will be "changed somewhat" by the text ([5]), is apparently trying sincerely to engage in a non-misogynistic way with the "battle of the sexes" genre of literature. In this novel, the young virgin Corinna instantly abandons her lifetime of accumulated education and experience of men's inferior place in society once she meets the rebel male Elvon L'Bender; like the reader, Corinna cannot understand her capitulation except to say that she has fallen prey to L'Bender's legendary (but undemonstrated) charisma. She and her mother are instantaneously converted to L'Bender's cause of "equality," although, as he confides to another male, L'Bender believes that true equality is impossible for humans and he is really just interested in keeping the social pendulum swinging--away, or so his logic would dictate, from the oppression of men and back towards the oppression of women. Possibly, although not necessarily, because the author is a woman, the highly romanticized sexual confrontation between Corinna and L'Bender is not a rape. What this passage has in common with the rape scenes of the more overtly misogynistic texts of this genre is its location of female sexuality and female power in woman's oneness with the earth (even if it is the earth of an alien planet):

> This was marvellous. She'd never felt so strong. . . . here she felt like a woman, like all women, stretching back and back through time and space. If she closed her eyes she was a giantess. . . . "This is the most natural thing there is," he said. "and [sic] we can share it. That's one of the best things about being alive." She believed him utterly.
>
> . . . . She lay on the moss like a star, arms and legs spread and felt like nothing but the essence of all that is female. . . . It all felt so animal; she wanted it no other way. . . . This is life, she thought. He is pumping life into me. (106)

This seductive mystification of the female body deflects attention from an illusion; despite the myth, "flesh is not," as Carter observes, "an irreducible human universal" (9). It "arrives to us out of history" like anything else, freighted with political import (Carter 9). "The roles," Russ insists, "are deadly. The myths that serve them are fatal" ("Heroine" 20).

While Jeannine derives from this myth a sense of power that allies her with the flowing sap and hidden roots of the ailanthus tree, this power is deceptive. The power of the tree is, after all, limited; it is the power to endure, but not to effect change; while its roots may be deep, they still are trapped in the concrete that paves the urban courtyard in the Depression-ridden city where it grows. Ultimately, both the tree and Jeannine, for as long as she is enmeshed in this mystical vision of her own femininity, although alluring, "merely embody" (109).

Janet Evason, as the narrator from the Utopian Whileaway, represents the only possibility for non-complicitous and non-violent oppositionality; ironically, of course, Whileaway is the only place such oppositionality is not required. Like many feminist utopias, the apparent stasis of the society is deceptive: Whileaway is actually undergoing a constant, if slow-paced evolution, in its language, social structures, and technology. Although Janet and Whileaway are, as Russ suggests, "in secret our savior[s] from utter despair" (213), they also, with the back-handed, double-edged irony intrinsic to utopian imaginings, reinforce this despair. Whileaway is, as Russ comments in an interview, a "kind of ideal," yet it is an ideal that can never be attained on our Earth or in our future since, Russ says, she "can't imagine a two-sexed egalitarian society," nor does she believe that "anyone else can, either" ("Reflections" 46).

Joanna and Jeannine represent different forms of, or failed attempts at, non-violent resistance; Jael, the fourth narrator, represents the suggestive paradoxes of violent resistance. Jael is in many ways the most alien and alienating of the four "psychic avatars" (Gilbert and Gubar, No Man's 116); she is also, curiously, the J-incarnation who, despite Joanna's sharing of the author's name, has many of the characteristics we most readily equate with the traditional narrator. Jael is, as Lefanu points out, the "organizing 'I'" (189), the cohesive force that brings together the other three narrative selves; she is also the only narrator who has any kind of narrative omniscience.[8] It is Jael who assembles the other narrators, who knows and tells them their histories, predicts their futures, and galvanizes the plot, such as it is, into action. Unlike the traditional narrator, however, Jael is by far the most elusive of the four, dropping, like the vamp she parodies, tantalizing, even coy hints of her presence without fully revealing herself. She does not appear in the flesh until Part Eight of the text. Her appearance at this precise juncture recalls the symbolism of the "sideways eight that means infinity," which, as part of the Whileawayan graffiti adorning an ancient statue, has added to it "a single straight line down from the middle; this is both the Whileaway schematic of the male genital and the mathematical symbol of self-contradiction" (100).

Like Joanna in her role as the paradoxical Female Man, and the confused and self-divided Jeannine, Jael exists in her own contradictions. She is, as Bartkowski observes, "a late-twentieth-century avatar of the most ghoulish aspects of the nineteenth-century femme fatale" (57), yet she also embodies the qualities of the witch or crone. The tempting mouth of the youthful and seductive vamp, for example, also parodies the toothless, dentured mouth of an old woman, as when Jael removes her sham teeth to reveal deadly metal fangs; her shrivelled, misshapen hands, hiding metallic fingernails, also ironically suggest the crone. Jael's violence is disturbing on many levels, not the least, for me, because it is at once repugnant and deeply satisfying, a forbidden fantasy of revenge for that catalogue of personal indignities to which all women have been subjected as the price of their survival in woman-hating cultures. If we cannot walk as Whileawayans may walk, "around the Whileawayan equator twenty times (if the feat takes your fancy and you live that long) with one hand on your sex and in the other an emerald the size of a grapefruit," risking nothing worse than "a tired wrist" (82), then the physical impunity of Jael's armoured flesh offers the next best thing, a grittier, angrier, meaner (in both senses of the word) freedom.

As Russ points out, however, Jael's violence is often seen as especially disturbing because it emanates from a woman rather than a man, and because it is directed towards men. Our perceptions of violence are distorted by the vast gap in the "acceptable" violence allowed men and the passivity expected of women. Even essentially non-violent feminist utopian texts, Russ observes, "because their violence is often directed by women against men are perceived as very violent by some readers" ("Recent" 81). She goes on to say that The Female Man, consistently reviewed as a deeply violent book, actually "contains only four violent incidents":

> . . . a woman at a party practices judo on a man who is behaving violently toward her and (by accident) hurts him; a woman kills a man during a Cold War between the sexes after provocation, lasting (she says) twenty years; a woman shots [sic] another woman as part of her duty as a police officer; a woman, in anger and terror, shuts a door cn a man's thumb (this incident is briefly mentioned and not shown). ("Recent" 81)

Perhaps what is disturbing about Jael's violence, as emblematized in her murder of the Boss, is that she acts not "in anger and terror" but in anger and joy, anger and relief, anger and arousal. Her sheer abandoned bloodthirstiness is as disorienting to the reader as voyeur as it is to the three other narrators who are actally present. Her lack of remorse, the depths of her self-satisfaction, her pleasure in the act of death are appalling, but her exhilaration is contagious: she feels "clean and satisfied from head to foot" (182). The newly-killed Manlander "Boss" is "pumping his life out onto the carpet. . . . The stupidity of it. The asininity of it. I love it, I love it," gloats Jael (182). Her inhuman act brings her, or so she believes, closer to the humanity denied her by the patriarchy; instead of a woman turning into a ghoul, she is a ghoul turning into a woman, reclaiming, with each act of violence, "a little of [her] soul" (195). Murder is, Jael believes, her "one way out":

> For every drop of blood shed there is restitution made;

> with every truthful reflection in the eyes of a dying man I get back a little of my soul; with every gasp of horrified comprehension I come a little more into the light. See? It's _me_!
>
> _I_ am the force that is ripping out your guts; I, I, I, the hatred twisting your arm; I, I, I, the fury who has just put a bullet into your side. It is I who cause this pain, not you. It is I who am doing it to you, not you. It is I who will be alive tomorrow, not you. (195)

There is no question but that Jael's acts of violence recapitulate, as Chambers predicts, the violence of the patriarchal regime she is trying to overcome. Even some of her fellow Womanlanders are uneasy with her violence; "'Being with Men," these "idealists" tell her, "has changed you'" (184). Jael's rage as a recapitulation of male violence is reinforced by Russ's rewriting, in her return to the mirror trope, of Virginia Woolf's observation that women's function has traditionally been to reflect men at twice their natural size. The military "Boss" with whom Jael negotiates ignores the three other women with her in order to engage in a hostile sexual/dialectical sparring:

> he doesn't waste a second on the pink crosses [emblazoned on the uniforms of the women] in purdah; they're only "women" anyhow (he thinks); _I'm_ the soldier, _I'm_ the enemy, _I'm_ the other self, the mirror, the master-slave, the rebel, the heretic, the mystery that must be found

> out at all costs. (174)

The true mirror, however, the mirror that tells the Boss the truth rather than showing him the image he desires, is the "truthful reflection" in the Boss's eyes as he dies (195); perhaps this is why Jael insists that he open his eyes before she attacks him (181). Jael only attacks after Boss tries to rape her, after several pages of restraint, and after repeatedly telling herself "Let it pass. Control yourself. Hand them the victory in the Domination Sweepstakes" (175). The Boss's response to both her acquiescence and her defiance is fairly unilateral:

> "You're a woman," he cries, shutting his eyes, "you're a beautiful woman. You've got a hole down there. You're a beautiful woman. . . . You want me, it doesn't matter what you say. You're a woman, aren't you? This is the crown of your life. This is what God made you for. I'm going to fuck you. I'm going to fuck you till you can't stand up. You want it." (181)

Jael's violence as a response to violence is problematic; is it also pathological? Certainly this adjective has frequently been applied to Jael. In describing the scene above, for example, Richard Law states that Jael "exhibits the pathological" (153). Woman's particularized anger at sexual abuse is appropriated and universalized by Law into "the age-old yearning for nemesis," even though Jael makes the specific source of her rage clear in this passage which Law cites:

> Think of placing your ladylike foot on the large, dead neck of a human dinosaur who has bothered you for months and has finally tried to kill you; there he lies, this big carnal flower gathered at last by Chaos and Old Night, . . . a creature brought down at last out of his pride to the truth of his organic being--and you did it (190).

Although the Miltonic overtones make this passage sweepingly epic in its tone, it is not the male reader who is invited to place his ladylike foot on the neck of his attacker, despite Law's attempt to place Jael in the role of universal nemesis--how else can her "weird, wild behaviour" be explained (Law 154)? In contrast to the epic prose which Jael devotes to this scene, Law trivializes it into (and his diction is instructive) "a fight with a masher" (153).

Although Gilbert and Gubar do not trivialize Jael's encounter with Boss, they too see her behaviour as "pathological" (No Man's 117). The frequency with which this term is related to Jael suggests, perhaps, an unconscious critical response to the medical discourse that Russ subversively deploys throughout The Female Man. The traditional trope of disease as a metaphor for a sick society is turned inside out; this demands a more complicated reading than one which implies, as Thelma J. Shinn does in "Worlds of Words and Swords," that there is a straightforward correlation in which sickness becomes a simple metaphor "for social ills" that "threaten the health of the community" (213). Rachel Blau DuPlessis comes much closer to my own reading of the disease trope when she calls Jael's anger "the only antidote" to the specific social ills of masculine domination and abuse, and notes that such "anger is healing" ("Apologues" 7). I would go further and argue that not only is Jael's anger a remedy, but that Jael herself is a remedy, functioning in the way that a vaccine functions: Jael introduces into the social body the disease that can kill it in order to cure it. This is, as the Boss has reason to learn, not always a safe procedure.

Notice how closely Jael is allied with notions of plague, corruption, and cancer. In Russ's redeployment of the disease trope, the idea of cancer itself is changed, undergoes a strange growth. Like Jael's "kill or cure" medicine, cancer seems to be, in the dystopian sterility of Manland, the only form of growth possible; what, after all, is cancer but growth in an unpredictable direction? The invisible narrator describes herself as "the plague system darting in the air between" Janet and her young lover, Laur (63); like the plague, still invisible, she "infect[s] the whole house" (58). Jeannine sees disease as a form of infiltration, of frightening corruption: "Somebody will get you in spite of all that rationality," she warns Janet. Jeannine sees the utopian Whileaway as perpetually vulnerable: "they can just infect you with plague, or infiltrate, or form a fifth column.

They can corrupt you" (92).

Jael, however, seems to say that the plague is perhaps not as destructive as it seems; her own eyes, in fact, sparkle "with the gaiety of corruption" (163). Her hands, with their retractable steel fingertips, are "cancer claws" which do not cripple her but give her great strength. As a compromised body replete with implants and disguises, secrets and hidden weapons, Jael knows something about the cost of such compromise. Unlike the uncorrupted idealists, Jael is free both to act and to take responsibility for her actions, even if she must mutate, become monstrous, to do so:

> Me with a new face, a puffy mask. Laid over the old one in strips of plastic, a blond Hallowe'en ghoul on top of the S.S. uniform. I was skinny as a beanpole underneath except for the hands, which were similarly treated, and that very impressive face. . . . [I] scared the idealistic children who lived downstairs. Their delicate skins [are] red with offended horror. (19)

Jael moves, like a tumour, through metastasis. She appears heterotropically in worlds where she does not belong and where she is not welcomed. She offers the violence of the truth. Janet's earlier dream proves prophetic: "I've dreamed of looking into a mirror," she says, "and seeing my alter ego which, on its own initiative, begins to tell me unbearable truths" (78). This is precisely what happens when Janet confronts Jael, who tells her the harshest truth of all about

Janet's beloved utopia: "Whileaway's plague," says Jael, of the epidemic that supposedly peacefully wiped out all the men on the planet generations ago, "is a big lie" (211). It was, Jael announces, "I who gave you your 'plague,' . . . about which you can now pietize and moralize to your heart's content; I, I, I, I am the plague, Janet Evason. I and the war I fought built your world for you" (211).

If love is, as Janet suspects, "a radiation disease" (79), then so is change. Like a text, like an idea, like resistance, Jael's disease is contagious; as Domenic Baker-Smith suggests, a utopian text is "designed to infect our reading of the world" (1). If oppression results in stasis, perhaps only ideas (if they carry a germ of truth) can be communicable. Like the subaltern flesh of woman, however, strategies of resistance and survival are ambivalently stigmatized. The compromised body partakes of this ambivalence. If the silenced body is a surface upon which unwanted patriarchal markings are inscribed, then the compromised body is in a less easily definable position: it is the site of self-inscription, but only of the limited inscriptions possible within dystopia. Those same bodily interventions that suggest the possibility of resistance mitigate, ironically, against resistance, because they demand the construction of a revolting body, one that denies the chance of resistance in any but a compromised flesh.

The Gate to Women's Country: Immaculate misconceptions

"I don't think we're ever going to get to utopia again by going forward, but only roundabout or sideways; because we're in a rational dilemma, an either/or situation as perceived by the binary computer mentality, and neither the either nor the or is a place where people can live."

Ursula K. Le Guin

"I don't hate humanity, I just hate some of the things people do. I wouldn't hurt people. . . "
"You'd liquidate ninety percent of the race to achieve your utopia."
"What a terrible thing to say!"

James Tiptree, Jr.

In "Virgin Territory: Women and Sex in Science Fiction," Beverly Friend discusses Ursula K. Le Guin's portrayal, in The Left Hand of Darkness, of the Gethenians, beings who are sexually neuter except during their mating period, when they randomly become biologically either male or female. The novel's narrator, a male bureaucrat visiting the planet, finds it difficult to adjust to the lack of gender divisions as he is used to them, and consistently reveals his unacknowledged contempt for what he perceives as "feminine" in Gethen's culture, politics, and people. To illustrate this contempt, Friend cites a key scene of confrontation between the alien narrator and his Gethenian guide, Estraven, as follows: "'I was galled by his patronizing,' [says the narrator]. 'He was a head shorter than I, and built more like a woman than a man, more fact than muscle'" (qtd. in Friend 56). Friend's quotation offers one of the most engagingly provocative typographical errors I have ever encountered. Le Guin's original says, more predictably, that Estraven was built with "more fat than muscle" (Left Hand 218), but I suspect that if Le Guin had seen Friend's variation on her theme, she would have been tempted to use it herself, since it inadvertently challenges the very assumptions about the "essential" qualities of masculinity and femininity that Le Guin's novel is dedicated to investigating.

Sheri S. Tepper's The Gate to Women's Country is similarly committed to an interrogation of the complex oppositions and interactions between nature and culture, the biological and the ideological. Tepper does this, first, by making such oppositions disturbingly literal, and, second, by at once evoking and transgressing the discursive codes of essentialist doctrine. The fact that The Gate to Women's Country does this simultaneously--relying upon a physical literalization of the tenets of biological essentialism for its plot while, at the same time, forcing its readers to face and query the implications of such tenets taken to their logical extremes--accounts for much of the novel's complexity and, for me, much of its fascination. Russell Blackford sees the plot's "action" as ultimately affirming a "crude social engineering program of mass eugenics, and a concomitant interpretation of human biology," although "both appear as tragically accepted necessities rather than as grounds for simple-minded celebration" (14).[9] Blackford reads Tepper's future as "neatly schematic" (14); the novel's complication of gender lines, however, through the inclusion of the male "servitors" who leave the garrison to serve in the women's cities (their title takes on new dimensions when the novel reveals how far their service goes beyond the merely domestic) unravels any neatly schematic "interpretation of human biology" (14). The novel's bleak sense of the tragic is not merely consolatory or cathartic, as Blackford's summary suggests, but radically reinvests the classical ideal of tragedy through its parodic appropriation of classical forms; the text contests, if it does not preclude, any simplistic or schematized reading.

According to Le Guin's famous dictum from the Introduction to The Left Hand of Darkness, "almost anything carried to its logical extreme becomes depressing, if not carcinogenic" ([i]). In The Gate to Women's Country, Tepper builds much of her narrative upon the metaleptic strategy of the logical extreme: she reifies the intricate workings of nature and nurture to such a literal degree that all her extremes begin to appear illogical, begin, in fact, to evoke their own opposites. Tepper destroys but also deploys stereotypes; she foregrounds questions of agency by reformulating these questions to focus on accountability; she undermines the text's tentative gestures towards resolution through an ending that is resolutely irresolute. The novel is, in many ways, a textual game, based on a strategic alternation between information that is withheld or withdrawn, delivered or deferred. All "facts" are illusory, partial, or elliptical. The text's insistence upon its own artifice--its repeated references to the untrustworthiness of appearance, the presence of the hidden and forbidden, and the play of illusion--all focus attention on the text as "a problem a-solving" (Friend, "Bonds" 160), a puzzle de-solving. Like The Handmaid's Tale, Tepper's novel undermines the claims to knowledge and authority of both narrator and reader, and reconstitutes "knowing" as a textual process, one that is full of deferrals and reversals, rather than as a single moment of disclosure or revelation. Its mode is, as Linda Hutcheon observes of the modes of postmodernism, "resolutely contradictory," and it demonstrates in its contradictions a tendentious commitment to doubleness and duplicity (1).

Duplicity is at the heart of The Gate to Women's Country; it is the key to the textual ambiguity with which Tepper creates her world, at once "hopeful and doubly disruptive and contradictory" (Roberts 137). The women's enclosed city is introduced, in the first pages of the text, with a sort of cloying cosiness that strains our sense of reality from the outset; the rain-filled gutters run "with an infant chuckle and gurgle, baby streams being amused with themselves" (1).

The "corniced buildings smiled candlelit windows across at one another," while the candlelight is "the least bit weepy, a luxurious weepiness, as after a two-hanky drama of love lost or unrequited" (1). The cobbled street along which Stavia progresses is filled with craftswoman's shops such as "candle makers, soap makers, quilters, knitters" (2), all homely, domestic, comforting things; even the light is "well done for the mood of the piece. Nostalgic. Melancholy without being utterly depressing" (2). This invocation of a false nostalgia, and the clash of this nostalgia with the ominous overtones of Stavia's grim journey, which will end in her ceremonial public renunciation by her own no-longer infant and no-longer amusing son, establish early in the text a rift in the reader's sense of the real.

This rift is emphasized by Stavia's own clearly articulated sense of self-alienation. Divorced from reality, she sees herself, we are told in the novel's first line, "from the outside, a darkly cloaked figure moving along a cobbled street" (1). The text thus immediately draws attention to the motif of interiors and exteriors which will be gradually elaborated as the social dynamics of the women's walled city are disclosed; we are also nudged to an awareness of mystery, disguise, and the operation of the hidden that will inform the text throughout. When Stavia wonders "what the set designer had in mind" (2), we are encouraged to expect, despite the false sense of security in what we apparently see and accept as the nature of the city, the exposure of a drama's false fronts and painted scenery, the revelation of some directing intelligence controlling the action from behind the scenes. Is this effect, Stavia wonders,

> to remind her of something? All the cosiness of candle flame and the gurgling gutters leading toward this sweet sadness of green light and softly scented mist? Too early to know, really. Perhaps it was only misdirection, though it might be intended as a leitmotif. (2)

The "leitmotif" is not, in fact, the scene's atmosphere but the concept of misdirection itself. Tepper's medium is misdirection, and the set is an increasingly transparent one, disguising increasingly mystifying operations. It is a tribute to Tepper's narrative skill that the reader is lured into forgetting the text's original warnings, overt as they are, and into accepting appearance as reality. Stavia self-consciously turns herself into an actor, employing "pretence" and "playacting" (3) in order to survive the ordeal of being renounced by her son, a renunciation which is part of the ceremonial initiation of a boy attaining the man's rank of warrior. As Stavia positions herself on stage, the reader is positioned as audience, offered a "front-row-center seat" (3). The reader thus becomes the audience necessary to the fulfilment of the scene, to the completion of the empty plaza and the deserted arches that "wept for spectators" (3). As in Walk to the End of the World, we are drawn into the text despite ourselves, and are made, moreover, complicit with it.

In contrast to this veiling of the hidden operations of the text, the religion of "the Lady," the "Great Mother" who is the goddess of Women's Country, is devoted to de-mystification and de-romanticization. As if to counteract the duplicity of the text, Tepper repeatedly injects into her narrative the Litany of the Lady, whose central tenet is: "No sentimentality, no romance, no false hopes, no self-petting lies, merely that which is" (9). Stavia as a child resents these strictures, reluctant to acknowledge that "the Great Mother didn't bargain" or "change her mind for women's convenience"; the prohibitions of the litany leave "very little room, Stavia thought, for womanly initiative" (9). However, as Stavia grows up and discovers, synchronously with the reader, the true workings of Women's Country, both are led to realize that the litany does not forbid "womanly initiative," but only forbids self-deception about the consequences of such initiative. Stavia's journey into experience is not, as in the traditional heroic quest, a movement from passivity to action, but a movement towards individual acceptance of responsibility for action. While Russ writes, in The Female Man, that "every choice begets at least two worlds of possibility" (6), Tepper asserts that every choice begets infinite possibilities of consequences, not all of which may be foreseen, but for all of which one may be held accountable.

It is in this sense that Tepper's novelistic vision, combining elements of the utopian and the dystopian, is perhaps the most morally complex and ambivalent of all the texts I examine herein. As I argue in my second chapter, the oppressive political technologies of dystopias such as those portrayed by Atwood, Charnas, and Burdekin prohibit effective opposition by the subaltern women trapped within them. But the secret leaders of Women's Country, those Council members who call themselves, with bitter humour, the "Damned Few," make choices not just for the survival of their race or gender but for what they envision as the betterment of both. For the Damned Few, these choices may mean the salvation of the human race at the cost of their own damnation.

The price of action, its personal and collective costs, is metaphorically illustrated in the play "Iphigenia at Ilium" that is re-enacted every year by the members of the Council. The play has several civic functions, as it has several functions in the text. It provides the Festival entertainment that is missing in the well-regulated and industrious lives of the city women; it teaches metaphorically that "all women are kin" (30); it is a satire and "commentary on particular attitudes of pre-convulsion society" (37); it teaches diverse historical lessons. "Iphigenia at Ilium" contrasts the history, mythology and poetry underlying traditional patriarchal culture with the suppressed, hidden histories of the women who are among that culture's unsung victims.

Telemachus, whose name, acccording to Robert Graves, means "decisive battle," is elevated to godhood by the warrior culture of the garrison and is worshipped by the soldiers as "the ideal son" (16). The text of the play, however, makes clear that the Law of the Father is not heroic but is founded instead on greed, violence, and fear. As the ghost of Iphigenia makes clear, both the phallic narrative and the paternal narrative enact their own desires upon the bodies of women, and then assert that these desires are shared by their victims. Classical insistence that the sacrificial offering be virginal suggests that the roots of such ritualistic murder might be found in the rape fantasy, as well as the other way around. As Susan Griffin writes, "in the pornographic mind, all along, the virgin _is_ a whore" (23). Although Griffin discusses rape as the archetypal punishment for the virgin/whore, it seems to me that the virgin sacrifice functions on the same dubious and punitive principles:

> For this woman, we must remember, is a figment of the pornographic imagination. She does not stand for the absence of knowledge, the way we might suppose. She stands instead for a lie. Her image signifies the _denial_ of sexual knowledge and desire which the pornographic mind has tried to forget but which it cannot forget. So in the pornographic fantasy, whenever the virgin is raped, she is told that she has always wanted to be raped. She is told that underneath her "innocence" she

> has the soul of a whore. (Griffin 23)

In the script of the play, Iphigenia interrogates this patriarchal conflation of virgin and whore in her deconstruction of the politics and poetics of myth. She speaks with the "shrill laughter" (52) of the demonic female spirit whose unleashed hilarity can deflate even the stately hexameter of classical verse: "Oh, Achilles, Achilles" Iphigenia declaims,

> After I died, you said that you admired / my courage, though courage it was not! / Anger it was, at all you murderous men. . . . / Some poet, hearing of your fatuous words / composed a song about the bloody deed, / and not content with truth, embroidered it / with fulsome lies and patent sentiments. . . .
>
> What people know is what they want to know. . . .
>
> Artemis sent no hind. Artemis had / more urgent business in some other place. / It was my blood spurting upon the stones. . . .
>
> And though by now all poets gloss it o'er / to make it seem a different, kinder thing, / there was no great Achilles at my side, / no goddess-given hind to take my place. / I made no offer of myself as sacrifice,
>
> though all the songs in Hellas say I did. (52-53)

When Hecuba asks for clarification of her words, Iphigenia abruptly drops her mock-heroic metre so that even Achilles can understand her: "I am attempting to explain to the warrior," she snaps, "that those who took my life murdered me" (53). When Achilles complains that he cannot understand "why they said all those things if they weren't true," Iphigenia replies:

> My father used me as he would a slave or a sheep from his flock. I think that many fathers do the same. Then, having done, he claimed I'd wanted it. Perhaps it made him feel less vile. Men like to think well of themselves, and poets help them do it. (56-57).

The play's text collapses the warrior mythologies that structure and support garrison culture; it reminds the women of the fatal guises and disguises of the heroic ideal.

For the Councilwomen who mount each year's production, however, the play is, first and foremost, teleologically mnemonic. It speaks in an encoded language of the necessary choices made by women, of being damned if you do and damned if you don't. As full of misdirection and secret codes as the text of the novel, the Iphigenia script offers multiple messages. Even its location is multivalent: the play's setting amongst the rubble of the broken walls of Troy suggests the possibility of the breaking down of walls, the elimination of boundaries, the collapse of borders. Just as a city with no walls invalidates the need for a gate, so the script's invocation of Troy seems hopeful for the dismantling of the walls, physical and otherwise, that encircle the cities of Women's Country. However, Troy is also a defeated city, and the walls have fallen only at the expense of thousands of lives, as attested by the ghostly population haunting the city's environs and the prisoners of war waiting to be executed among the rubble. Both the presence of the walls and their absence, therefore, are problematic. Like the Moëbius-shaped stone that the young warrior Chernon gives to Stavia, the physical borders of Women's Country are misleading; they are, like the surfaces of the stone, "smooth and weird, outside becoming inside, inside becoming outside" (181). The dismantling of such shifting borders can never be, as Tepper's text admonishes, a simple task.

As public spectacle, and as part of the biannual festival season which permits the only unregulated interaction of women and warriors permitted within the strict segregation maintained between the cities and the garrisons surrounding them, the Iphigenia play seems to offer possibilities for disruption and unruliness. But its conventionalized script and the didactic and institutionalized role it plays in the celebrations deplete these possibilities. As Mikhail Bakhtin and other theorists have observed, this doubleness is characteristic of the carnivalesque, which incites disorder while promising a return to order. The festival season itself, like the play performed in it, partakes of the same paradox: the festival offers a period of sanctioned deregulation which is nevertheless strictly regulated, if only in its carefully limited time period and its carefully controlled boundaries. Like much else in Women's Country, boundaries are both visible and invisible, marked and hidden. The lapses in social order allowed by carnival, as I shall demonstrate, obscure the surfaces of these boundaries, but never entirely dissolve them.

The secrets and subterfuges of Women's Country culture obfuscate, rather than elucidate, borders. Evelyn Fox Keller, in "Making Gender Visible," uncovers the dynamics hidden in deceptive social practice:

> Well-kept secrets pose a predictable challenge to those who are not privy. Secrets function to articulate a boundary: an interior not visible to outsiders, the demarcation of a separate domain, a sphere of autonomous power. And indeed, the secrets of women, like the secrets of nature, are and have traditionally been seen by men as potentially threatening--or if not threatening, then alluring--in that they articulate a boundary that excludes them, and so invite exposure or require finding out. (69, my emphasis)

Michael and Chernon, as representatives of, respectively, the leadership and rank-and-file of the garrison, are driven by this obsessive need to uncover the women's secrets. "None of them in Women's Country show us their real faces," observes Chernon in a moment of uncharacteristic lucidity (216). "It seems very simple on the surface," he asserts, "but there's more here than we can see" (217). What most disturbs Chernon and Michael is not their suspicion of the existence of a different layer of reality, but that they have "no way to get at it" (217). "Getting at it" carries a sense of aggression as well as the need to discover or uncover--if, indeed, the two impulses can ever be entirely separated. Both Michael and Chernon construct the women's "secret" as something they must not only find out but claim for their own. Since Tepper has mystified science, positioning it not as the rational decipherant of mystery but as a source of mystery itself, the roles of science and secrets are conflated and confused. Keller illustrates the ways in which modern science has "invented a strategy for dealing with this threat, for asserting power over nature's potentially autonomous sphere," a strategy which is "precisely a method for the 'undoing' of nature's secrets" (69).

When science resides in the realm of the feminine, as Tepper radically and anarchically relocates it in The Gate to Women's Country, the men excluded from its power employ, ironically, the equivalent of a scientific method in order to uncover its secrets. The metaphors of penetration and predation which inform scientific discourse are literally enacted by Michael and Chernon in their roles as spies and invaders in the foreign territory of Women's Country. They use procedures of infiltration to render "what was previously opaque, transparent," and "previously invisible, visible," a project in which

> the ferreting out of nature's secrets, understood as the illumination of a female interior, or the tearing of nature's veil, may be seen as expressing one of the most unembarrassedly stereotypic impulses of the scientific project. In this interpretation, the task of scientific enlightenment--*the illumination of the reality behind appearances*--is an *inversion of surface and interior, an interchange between visible and invisible* that effectively routs the last vestiges of archaic, subterranean female power. (Keller 69, my emphasis)

In *The Gate to Women's Country*, subterranean female power is conflated with the traditionally masculine power of science, which Ruth Bleier, in contrast to Keller, reads as every bit as enigmatic as the sublimated natural power of the buried feminine, as, in fact, "powerful, mysterious, impenetrable, coercive, anonymous," and "male" (62). It is the female doctors of the women's Council, however, who typify this position in the text, with their secret eugenic manipulations of nature. If the festival's carnivalesque body foreshadows the compromised physical body, as I will argue, then the Damned Few represent the morally compromised social body.

Once Tepper has confirmed our readerly loyalties to the women of the Council, through the intimacy of knowledge and shared experience, and through exposing the oppression they endure at the hands of the brutal and treacherous male soldiers, she challenges those loyalties by directing towards them a moral scrutiny whose terms are defined by the women themselves. If we are reluctant, because of this sense of intimacy, to judge the Councilwomen for their actions (as we might more easily judge the anonymous Matris of Walk to the End of their World for their similar acts of murder, subterfuge, and coercion) Tepper forces us to judge them through the imperatives of her narrative structure and her unique use of the hermeneutic code. For postmodernist or metafictional writers, Patricia Waugh suggests, the hermeneutic code is often "ultimately a metaphysical one," since

> such writers use this supremely rational form of the novel in the service of the supremely non-rational (Borges, Spark), the irrational (Nabokov, Angela Carter) or the anti-rational (Fowles, Bathelme). In Spark's fiction, the hermeneutic code functions in reverse. The question "What happens next?" is subordinated to the question "Why did it happen?" through the fairly simple device of giving away the ending near the beginning of the narrative. The hermeneutic code is thereby translated into the terms of a metaphysical or moral enquiry. (Metafiction 83)

Tepper uses her device of the narrative flashback to achieve similar ends to those cultivated by Muriel Spark with her device of what Waugh calls the "flashforward" (83); both emphasize, through their use of shifting temporalities, the "apparently contingent details which are normally passed over" and which "normally only become significant in the light of knowledge of the ending, during a second reading" (Waugh 83). The suspense generated by the invocation of the hermeneutic code is never suspended in Tepper's text; in fact, the textual segues which move Stavia backwards and forwards in time and memory work to heighten this tension from the very first pages in which the adult Stavia reflects on the passage of time: "She was thirty-seven, so he was fifteen. She had been twenty-two when . . . when everything" (3). The questions of "What happens next?" and "Why did it happen?" are thus brought into a tenuous and shifting balance, whose fulcrum is a more ambiguous question: "Should it have happened?" It is in this sense that Tepper's narrative becomes, in Waugh's terms, "a metaphysical or moral enquiry" (83); attention is displaced from the action itself onto the purposes of, reasons for, and consequences to the action.

The Councilwomen of the women's cities, who are also the cities' physicians and scientists as well as its dramaturges and actors, are at the heart of this moral and metaphysical controversy. These women are the locus of strange and contradictory convergences. The healing work they perform in their communities is textually undermined with their more brutal prescriptions for population control and the diffusion and regulation of male aggression. They secretly implant hormonal prophylactics in the arms of women who they believe make undesirable breeding stock, claiming the injections are vitamin supplements. They manipulate genetic material not only to breed out male aggression but also to weed out such perceived aberrations as homosexuality, which they pathologize as a "syndrome." They arrange wars in order to (literally) bleed off male military zeal. As doctors, the Councilwomen are protected by the same factors that have always protected scientists from public scrutiny. Science is, to the non-initiate, an impregnable bastion presented by "the esoteric nature of what scientists do and the mystique of science as an objective and true account of the world" (Bleier 56). We must therefore direct towards the Councilwomen's ceremonial robes the same questions that Ruth Bleier asks of the scientist's more recognizably iconic garb:

> It is the lab coat, literally and symbolically, that wraps the scientist in the robe of innocence--of a pristine and aseptic neutrality--and gives him, like the klansman, a faceless authority that his audience can't challenge. From that sheeted figure comes a powerful, mysterious, impenetrable, coercive, anonymous male voice. How do we counter that voice? (62)

Women's Country's answer to this question is that we cannot counter this voice, but that it can be uncovered, unveiled, disrobed. Beneath the veil, however, is not the arrogant figure of the scientist who has violated nature's secrets and dominated nature itself, but the self-aware, selfcastigating, sometimes self-doubting doctor of the Council. And finally, our moral judgement is not suspended but qualified in the face of the Damned Few's self-judgement. If the Iphigenia play is a lacerating reminder to these women of their responsibility and culpability, it is also their final defense, the plea for extenuating circumstances with which Tepper chooses to end the novel. As the ghost of Andromache observes:

> Dead or damned, that's the choice we make. Either you men kill us and are honoured for it, or we women kill you and are damned for it. Dead or damned. Women don't have to make choices like that in Hades. There's no love there, nothing to betray. . . . (315)

Hades is, Iphigenia summarizes, like

> a dream without waking. Like carrying water in a sieve. Like coming into harbour after storm. Barren harbour where the empty river runs through an endless desert into the sea. Where all the burdens have been taken away. You'll understand when you come there at last. . . Hades is Women's Country. (315)

The question of agency in Women's Country is not centred on whether or not agency is possible but on the inevitable compromises and collusions which agency demands within a dystopian culture. Action is possible within the boundaries of Women's Country, but those same boundaries contaminate all action by limiting and delimiting the sphere of women's agency. The very possibility of action within such a sphere becomes, in Tepper's novel, damning in itself, because to abdicate agency is ultimately as incriminating as to accept the consequences of acting. In this sense the novel has long anticipated Iphigenia's claim that Hell is for women; the pomegranate-shaped handle of the gate leading into the women's city, with its mythological echoes of the transgressive act of consumption that dooms Persephone to residence in the underworld, anticipates Iphigenia's final equation of Hades with Women's Country. The Damned Few commemorate their sins of commission in their deliberate echoing of the men's rhetoric of war and destruction. Before killing the treacherous soldiers of the Marthatown garrison, for example, Morgot tells the story of the men who destroyed the pre-Holocaust world:

> It was men who made the weapons and men who were the diplomats and men who made the speeches about national pride and defense. And in the end it was men who did whatever they had to do, pushed the buttons or pulled the string to set the terrible things off. And we died. . . . Almost all of us. Women. Children. (301)

Only a few pages later, however, this same condemnatory language is directed at the women of the Council, when Stavia reflects that it is the Damned Few who "kept things running . . . who did what had to be done" (313, my emphasis). And, in Women's Country, it is certainly the Councilwomen who push the buttons and pull the strings in their adroit manipulation of both the soldiers of the garrisons and their own, uninitiated citizens. Through such textual devices, the Damned Few are represented as the overtly and morally compromised political body of Women's Country. There is, however, a more subtly and physically compromised body hinted at in the novel, which is represented through the (apparently) unregulated flesh of the carnivalesque body.

The culture of Women's Country depends upon the perpetual and carefully maintained tension between the rigorously segregated and regulated daily life of the cities and garrisons and the comparatively extravagant excesses of their bi-annual Festival. Quotidian life is distinguished from Festival by its hierarchy, regimentation, and orderliness, while Festival is distinguished from quotidian life by its exuberant disregard of all three. Or so it would appear. Like much else in Women's Country, the apparent disorder of Carnival is illusory: while soldiers from the garrison can enter and leave the women's towns freely, can drink and intermingle uninhibitedly, and can sleep with as many women as they wish, the understated regimentation which still informs the Carnival period is, by common consent, ignored. Assignations are arranged in advance, are carefully scheduled and monitored by "Assignation Mistresses," and all the careless revelry actually occurs under the auspices of an elaborate system of paperwork and permits. In Women's

Country, even Carnival's licentiousness is licensed.

Like much else in the novel, this fact is obscured by what occurs on the surface of Carnival: the rowdy drinking songs, colourful costumes, and noisy debauchery deflect attention away from Carnival's inherent bureaucracy. And, also like much else in the novel, such subterfuge is successful because it is founded on powerful preconceptions and misconceptions. This is true both for the soldiers who are deceived by the appearances of Women's Country and for readers who are equally and successfully misdirected. Even though Tepper saturates her novel with clues about its own deceptiveness--with repeated references to the turning of hidden wheels, for example, or to masks and false faces--the reader's attention is so successfully directed to the folly of the soldiers, in their ludicrously paranoid search for a secret, magical woman's weapon and their dangerous and ridiculous games of intrigue and infiltration, that we not only fail to give these clues adequate attention but we find ourselves recapitulating the warriors' mistakes even as we laugh at or condemn them. When it becomes clear that the women really do have several secret weapons of a varied and surprising nature, we are therefore more shocked than the "paranoid" warriors, who were looking for the wrong secret, but who were, as it turns out, correct in suspecting the secret's existence.

Tepper divulges this strategy in surprisingly overt ways throughout the novel. The success of her narrative depends, in fact, like the successful machinations of the Women's Council, upon a careful juxtaposition of the open and the hidden, a technically bold baring of technique in order to disguise other, as yet hidden, operations at work; in The Gate to Women's Country there are, as Stavia notes, not just wheels but wheels within wheels (217). One of Tepper's most overt gestures of narrative disclosure comes through the itinerant magician Septimus Bird, who appears periodically throughout the text as a one-man classical chorus, making obscure predictions and glossing the prestidigitous narrative with his commentaries on the craft of magic. Septimus, like Tepper, makes his living "fooling people" (214); his skill is, as he claims, in "making people think they see what they do not see. Making people believe [he has] done what [he has] not done": "I know all the lies people tell themselves," says Septimus, and "I help them to lie to themselves; it is my craft" (216).

The men in the garrison are perfect subjects for this kind of misdirection. The culture of lies that the Councilwomen successfully maintain depends, as does Septimus's magic, on the "lies people tell themselves" (216). The warriors fail to see, for example, the true purpose of Carnival, which is to provide a carefully contained and controlled environment for the women's ongoing experiments in eugenics. They fail to understand Carnival for what it is because of their own fatal predispositions: to believe that things are always as they appear; to believe that women are too stupid to hatch successful plots; to believe, especially, that women would not tamper with reproductive matters because motherhood is the most fundamentally important aspect of a woman's life. Garrison mythology deliberately fosters this belief:

> "In bearing a son for a warrior, a woman earns her life." That's the way the indoctrination for boys went. "Your mother earned her life so." Another saying was, "There's no use or excuse for a childless woman." (143)

To the warriors, women are "ontologically always pregnant" (Haraway, Primate 353); they are also teleologically always pregnant. Therefore, although the garrison is cavalier about birth records, leaving such matters to the women, it displays a naive trust in the women's handling of such things, based on the twin articles of faith that manly honour ensures virility and that no woman would ever "cheat" about such an important issue. As the young warrior-initiate Chernon reflects,

> It was dishonorable to drink so much during carnival that you couldn't remember what women you'd been with, though most of the men had been guilty of that. More than one man had received a printed card from the assignation mistress after carnival, signed by some woman the warrior couldn't really remember. The cards always said the same

> thing. "If it is a boy, I will bring him to his warrior father when he is five." The cards went into the men's file at headquarters. A man might not exactly remember, but no man with a card file for the proper date would care to say the son wasn't his when it showed up almost six years later. It would be the same as admitting lack of manhood! (143)

Although Chernon's summary is naive, and reflects his own unquestioning adoption of garrison values, the women are so careful in their records of copulation and birth that it is easy to assume it is because they share the warriors' valorization of the bearing of sons:

> The conventional wisdom in the garrison was that it didn't matter if a man remembered clearly or not. Even though everybody knew that women cheated about other things, it was generally agreed that they were honest and sensible about warrior's sons because it was in their own best interest to do so. Women knew the warriors protected them only because the women bore them sons, so it was in the women's interest to see that sons were produced and brought to the appropriate father. . . . Sons were the single most important thing in life to a warrior, and the women knew that. (143)

It is only according to "conventional wisdom" (143) and in the transparent rhetoric of the garrison's code of honour, however, that sons are the most important thing to a warrior;

in reality, personal pleasure, personal comfort, and a reputation for, if not the reality of, personal honour far outrank the importance of sons. Because the centrality of sons is so emphatically declared in warrior mythology, however, the soldiers make the mistake of assuming that the women place the same importance on bearing sons that the warriors claim to. This is the first level of misdirection that the previous passage elaborates. The doctors of the Council manipulate the men's ritualized belief in the importance of reproducing males in order to convince them that women share such a belief, or at least acquiesce to it; in reality, the doctors foster such belief because it occludes the reproductive interventions in which they are really engaged.

There is also a second level of deception at play in this passage. Despite a number of clues, as readers we do not yet know that the women do, in fact, "cheat" at the reproduction game, and in ways far more radical than any the soldiers could begin to conceive. We have seen, however, how scrupulously honest and, to usurp the soldiers' rhetoric, "honourable" the women are about other things, such as the division of goods with the garrison. The garrison's only responsibility is the protection of the town from occasional attack by the warriors of other garrisons. The city women are responsible for all other labour, and pay the soldiers for their protection by supplying them with the products of that labour. Women and children live in continually short supply in order to ensure that the largest and the best portion goes to the men. When Chernon echoes the widespread warriors' belief that women cheat in their dealings with the garrison, therefore, my first response, as a reader who has been given ample evidence to the contrary, is to respond: "they do not!" and to take the warriors' assumptions as further proof of their self-centredness, wilful ignorance, and general malicious stupidity about women. In the heat of this indignation, as Tepper no doubt intends, the suggestion that the women might not cheat at one thing but might still cheat at another never arises, and the whole question of the women's handling of birth records is effectively elided.

There is yet a third level of deception at work in this passage, however; this is the level where the most radical effect of Tepper's narrative strategy emerges. While, at the first and second levels of deception, Tepper is engaging in Septimus Bird's craft of helping people to deceive themselves by playing on their preconceptions, on the third level the narrative exposes to the reader her own complicity in the delusionary process. When, at the end of the novel, the extent of the women's genetic experiments are fully exposed, the shock we feel is akin to the shock of the murdered soldiers who discover the truth moments before they die. By being aligned in this way with the solders in the long-deferred moment of textual revelation, we are forced to wonder how, despite the text's many hints, we were as taken in as they. It is at this point that the extent of our own preconceptions and predispositions are exposed. Freud claimed in Moses and Monotheism that, while "maternity is proved by the senses," paternity "is a surmise" (145-46; qtd. in Keller 68); I would not be at all shocked to learn that Tepper had this claim ironically in mind, since, in The Gate to Women's Country, paternity is (for the reader as much as for the warriors who discover they did not, after all, father the sons of Women's Country) inevitably a surprise. We are forced to acknowledge that the text has duped us not because it has lied but because it has told the truth. We take Chernon's thoughts on childbearing at face value not because we trust Chernon as an interpreter of Women's Country culture but because we inadvertently participate in our own culture's faith in the ontological importance of the production of sons.

Carnival and its deceptions are important, therefore, because they highlight and focus the various levels of misdirection upon which the text is founded. Carnival emphasizes the tension between appearance and reality, and the tension between the restraint of quotidian life and the disorderly revelry of the festival. There is another function of Carnival within the text, however, that is even more suggestive: the tension between "real" life and Carnival life masks a similar struggle between the constrained body and the carnivalesque body.

Like the compromised body, the carnivalesque body is represented in ambivalent ways. In The Female Man, revolutionary potential is at once suggested and limited by the genesis of the physically compromised body: Jael is both a revolutionary and a conservative figure, because she suggests that in order to revolt against the enemy, it is also necessary to revolt against your own flesh. It is no accident that Jael's body is repeatedly referred to using the rhetoric of horror: she is a ghoul, a ghost, a monster. Despite the fact that Jael revels in her self-imposed distance from the traditional morphology of the "normal" body, the division between the "normal" female body and her deliberately compromised body, a division as sharp as Jael's steel claws, suggests that successful revolt might be impossible in the flesh, or, if you are a woman, in your own flesh. Instead, resistance demands the cultivation of a revolting body, with all the ambiguities and contraditions such a body entails.

In The Gate to Women's Country, a similarly restricted notion of (potential) corporeal agency is suggested through Tepper's textual deployment of the carnivalesque body. Like the notion of Carnival itself, the carnivalesque body emphasizes the ambiguities implicit in the systematic overturn of order that is part of Carnival's simultaneous regulation and de-regulation. Theorists of Carnival debate over its emancipatory potential: if the "play" of Carnival is the play of order with disorder, predicated upon the ultimate stabilization of a post-Carnival return to order, does Carnival merely dissipate and/or control revolutionary energy? Or is even the carefully limited latitude of Carnival emancipatory in that it calls into question the irreversibility of "natural" hierarchies and thus interrogates the whole idea of the natural?[10]

In Positions and Presuppositions in Science Fiction, Darko Suvin notes that utopia, science fiction, and satire share common roots in the carnivalesque. These genres have all, Suvin observes,

> originated in tales and legends connected with the folk-inversions of the Saturnalia--that extraordinary time of the year when sexual, political and ideological roles were all reversed, when glimpses of new and radically different existential possibilities were allowed to appear as a vent in the surcharged atmosphere of rigid class society. (34-35)

It is during the popular participatory festivals such as Saturnalia or Mardi Gras, as Robert C. Elliott points out in the first chapter of The Shape of Utopia, that the "Golden Age" may be relived in a time especially set apart from daily or normal time. Ironically, however, in The Gate to Women's Country it is during Carnival that sexual roles return not to a lost, mythologized ideal but to what are easily identifiable as pre-Holocaust, pre-Convulsion norms. For this period only, for example, women put on frivolous and decorative clothes, indulge in flirtations, and replicate twentieth-century dating rituals.

This complicates the idea of Carnivalesque parody as destabilizing, because the parody is unconscious. Like the poem which Stavia periodically recalls, the leftover twentieth-century rituals are "not so much lost as unremembered" (19). Mary Russo notes that

> the categories of carnivalesque speech and spectacle are heterogenous, in that they contain the protocols and styles of high culture in and from a position of debasement. The masks and voices of carnival resist, exaggerate, and destabilize the distinctions and boundaries that mark and maintain high culture and organized society [through] all manner of recombination, inversion, mockery, and degradation. (218)

When, as in The Gate to Women's Country, however, the original of the parody has been forgotten, then even the parody itself simply re-evokes and recreates the terms of the original. Carnival therefore does not so much parody pre-Convulsion social customs as reinvent them.

What has not been forgotten, either in Women's Country or in the garrison, is desire. The female body during Carnival expresses a parody of desire by unconsciously re-enacting the obsolete rituals of desire. But Carnival in Women's Country is complex, and parody is seldom simple, as we have seen in the elaborate and multi-layered parodies of the Iphigenia play. Carnival parodically elicits and restricts desire. It elicits desire by allowing the trappings of sexual allure, and it restricts desire by containing it within a rigidly delimited period of time (the weeks of Festival) and within a carefully defined space (the taverns and assignation houses which are, significantly, boarded up during the rest of the year). Carnival expresses desire in much the same way that Rosemary Jackson describes the fantastic as expressing desire:

> In expressing desire, fantasy can operate in two ways (according to the different meanings of "express"): it can tell of, manifest or show desire (expression in the sense of portrayal, representation, manifestation, linguistic utterance, mention, description), or it can expel desire, when this desire is a disturbing element which threatens cultural order and continuity (expression in the sense of pressing out, squeezing, expulsion, getting rid of something by force). In many cases fantastic literature fulfils both functions at once, for desire can be "expelled" though having been "told of" and thus vicariously experienced by author and reader. (3-4)

Like fantasy, Carnival manifests desire by allowing for its expression, but ejects desire, as unsettling and therefore threatening, through the process of telling. Desire is therefore, in Carnival, at once represented and restrained.

Women's Country locates this tension between containment and restraint in the carnivalesque body. For women, however, the outline of the carnivalesque body is always present. The carnivalesque body is not merely a temporary product of Carnival; the body during Carnival is, in fact, only the shadow of the omnipresent carnivalesque body, evoked at times of Carnival as a prophecy and a warning. Women must spend their desire in an approved fashion at Carnival; as Chernon naively notes, no soldier is spurned during the assignation periods, which suggests that the women of the cities are either promiscuously universal in their appetites or are swallowing their distaste in order to do their carnival duty (143). This regulated taxing of desire is related to another kind of social control: if desire is not dissipated in the orderly disorderliness of carnival, it might be left over to ferment into something truly uninhibited.

The only outlet for illicit desire, outside of Carnival, is the Gypsy camp; significantly, the camp is located beyond the walls of the Women's city. The Gypsy camp is where soldiers who cannot wait for Carnival's sanctioned intercourse take women, either by persuasion or abduction. An isolated and despised colony of (literal) outsiders, the "gypsies" are considered "ruined" women--ruined for breeding, and for citizenship in Women's Country. Like their uncontained and unregulated desire, these women must be expelled and disenfranchised. What is troubling is that this expulsion is performed, at least implicitly, by the Councilwomen. While they try to dissuade girls from running away to the camp, they also keep them there once they go by forbidding them entrance to the city. As with Carnival itself, then, which is so efficiently managed by the Councilwomen, it is the members of the Council who assume the task of regulating resistance and disorderliness. Although this is done in order that the larger resistance of the doctors' secret programme of genetic engineering may go on in protected secrecy, we are forced to ask again whether such large-scale acts of resistance are fatally compromised by, if not negated by, the small oppressions which the women of the Council find themselves in the anomalous and reluctant position of enforcing.

Illicit desire is thus literally expelled from the women's cities, while licit desire is contained and diffused within the regulated rituals of Carnival. Beyond these two outlets, there is little room for desire, sexual or revolutionary or both. The hope for resistance advanced by the shadowy presence of the carnivalesque body is, it seems, negated by the ease with which Women's Country either exiles or contains desire. The moral compromises exhibited by the Women's Council offer no revolutionary triumph, merely a survival that is eclipsed by a constant self-conscious awareness of its price; the physical compromises of the carnivalesque body are either contained or exiled, so that their revolutionary potential is drained, evacuated, or excised.[11]

The whole notion of compromise and the compromised body therefore moves us at once closer to the possibility of resistance and further away from its realization. The presence, in The Female Man, of various forms of bodily compromise delineates the revolutionary outlines of an intumescent, revolutionary, disruptive desire; yet Jael's very monstrousness suggests that a merely human revolt, in an unmodified flesh, might never be possible or adequate. In The Gate to Women's Country, the deliberate tension between Carnival's subtle containment and the uncondoned, exiled, and invisible carnivalesque body emphasizes that even the complex risks of physical, political, or moral compromise ensure only a survival that is mitigated, tenuous, and contingent, plagued by the damning possibilities of agency. The fine lines walked, drawn, and negotiated by the compromised body may win survival but not much else; the conservative, self-perpetuating nature of dystopia can absorb even that survival for its own, uncompromising, ends.

Notes to Chapter Three

1.The ways in which these female bodies have been represented have been thoroughly documented; see, for example, Beverly Friend, "Virgin Territory: The Bonds and Boundaries of Women in Science Fiction" and "Women and Sex in Science Fiction"; Scott Sanders, "Woman as Nature in Science Fiction"; Kathryn M. Grossman, "Woman as Temptress: The Way to (Br)otherhood in Science Fiction Dystopias"; Joanna Russ in "The Image of Women in Science Fiction."

2.Robinson made this remark at panel on "Women as Characters in Science Fiction" at the 1990 Con/Text conference in Edmonton, Alberta.

3.For another analysis of Frankenstein's monster as feminine, see Gilbert and Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic; see also Marcia Tillotson's "A Forced Solitude: Mary Shelley and the Creation of Frankenstein's Monster."

4.For an atypical reading of "Helen O'Loy" as nonsexist, see Dominick M. Grace's "Rereading Lester del Rey's 'Helen O'Loy'." Grace asserts that, "far from offering Helen as a model, or ideal, of femininity," Del Rey instead "embodies in her a cautionary image of what might result should sexist fantasies become the basis for the creation of an artificial intelligence" (46).

5.The "exotic alien" of space-exploration SF probably evolved from the "primitive princess," a stock figure from one branch of proto-science fiction, the lost world story. Both alien and "savage" are generally represented as mysterious, foreign, and imbued with a sexuality that is at once alluring and appalling, irresistible and threatening. Both are also legitimate subjects of conquest who are immediately available to the imperialistic programme (sexual or social or both) of the explorer figure. Interesting comparisons might be drawn, for example, between H. Rider Haggard's mysterious Ayesha, "She-who-must-be-obeyed" from Haggard's 1887 novel She, and the enticing Medusa-like alien in C.L. Moore's fascinating 1933 story "Shambleau." Descriptions of both woman consistently turn upon a point of unveiling that is more than a mere disrobing: in each text, the divinely beautiful form reveals an infernal or monstrous ugliness within or beneath it. Moore's Shambleau is explicitly a gorgon; Northwest Smith, the partially-caricatured male hero (Gubar 18), sees Shambleau unveiled and realizes "that he looked upon Medusa" (Moore 20). Smith manages narrowly to avoid either death or the symbolic castration of blindness which is the penalty for viewing the gorgon. Allen Quartermain, Smith's heroic ancestor, experiences this penalty only metaphorically: "I have looked on beauty," he says after seeing Ayesha unwrapped, "and I am blinded" (119).

For an overview of several "lost world" texts, see Thomas D. Clareson's "Lost Lands, Lost Races: A Pagan Princess of their Very Own"; for a more in-depth look at Haggard's princess-trope, see Margaret Atwood's "Superwoman Drawn and Quartered: The Early Forms of She."

6.In the media-nightmare short story "Baby, You Were Great," Wilhelm anticipates cyberpunk's later version of "sim-stims," a sensory-sympathetic medium, in which the "viewer" is cerebrally connected to the artificially enhanced sensory organs of the media star in order to experience extreme sensations simultaneously with the performer.

7.Russ has been playing with this idea of the interconnection of internal and external since early in her literary career. In her second novel, And Chaos Died (1970), the psi-endowed new Eve, Evne, attempts to educate the people of Earth, claiming that "What [they] call psionics" is merely the result of "perception and education, nothing more, although you don't believe that . . . Outside is Inside" (182).

8.Some narrative comments that reveal omniscience are anonymous; it is unclear, for example, whether the narrative "I" who claims to be "the spirit of the author" who "know[s] all things" (166) is Jael, Joanna, or, as I suspect, some fifth, invisible, auctorial presence.

9.Like James Tiptree, Jr., Tepper frequently experiments with the feminist implications of controlled breeding and genetic manipulation. This experimentation is an antidote to the trend among science fiction writers, which Russ castigates in "The Image of Women in Science Fiction," to associate the matriarchal with "two things: biological engineering and social insects" (87).

10.For the critical debate surrounding the theory of Carnival, see Mary Russo's "Female Grotesques," Mikhail Bakhtin's Rabelais and His World, and Natalie Zemon Davis's "Women on Top."

11.The fact that the Council has been successful in keeping their plots a secret could be interpreted as a triumph for the women; however, Tepper encodes into the text far too much ambivalence about the costs and consequences of these plots to allow for such an unqualified reading. The success of the women's eugenics programme is also qualified: although the number of boys leaving the garrison to return to the women's cities is slowly increasing, the fact that the servitors still cultivate martial disciplines, and will use them, if necessary, in defense of Women's Country and of their personal honour (as when Joshua "needs" to kill Michael [305]), forces us to examine closely the quality as well as the implications of their evolution.

Chapter IV
Speech Impediments: The Adumbrated Body

"For language is, in fact, the form par excellence, and the structuring agent, of man's relation with other men."

Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic

"Her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible."

Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa"

If the silenced body is constrained by its dystopian inscription, and the compromised body is riddled with the ruptures of ambiguous resistance, then perhaps it is only the spoken body, the body (re)constructed through a revisionary language of revolt, that offers any hope of reclaiming the disputed, dissenting body. The revision of phallogocentric language is, however, as problematic as the revision of phallogocentric culture, and the reclamation of the body, if it is indeed possible, is often a vexing as well as a vexed process. Language and discourse are such "powerful ideological tools" precisely because, as Sally Robinson argues, they "represent the politics of the dominant ideology while concealing the fact that our knowledge and perceptions of the world are always mediated by language" (108). It is the function of discourse, in fact, to obscure not only its own biases, but the fact that it operates upon any biases at all. The nature of discourse is, in its claim to neutrality and objectivity, self-concealing.

Western culture has traditionally privileged the claims of "objective" discourse over the more ambiguous claims of subjectivity. This is reflected in the kinds of language hierarchies which accompany the hierarchies of discourse; the discursive dialect of the public sphere (academic/scientific/rational) is utterly unlike that of the private. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar stress, for example, the historical opposition between the materna lingua, the private, inherited, vernacular speech acquired from the mother, and the patrius sermo, the public, cultivated, formal speech of the Father(s) ("Sexual Linguistics" 516). Although the recuperation and revaluation of the materna lingua may offer a language which, as Annegret J. Weimer suggests, "is not seen as inscribing itself into patriarchal silence, but rather into a collective maternal eloquence" (165), that eloquence is still inevitably shaped by the idiom through which it must speak. We still cannot avoid, as Weimer observes, formulating and re-formulating "the question [posed] by Luce Irigaray: 'How can women analyze their exploitation, inscribe their claims, within an order prescribed by the masculine?'" (163). It is, as Ross Chambers notes, "minoritized people" who "are most inescapably aware that they are constituted by the language of the other while knowing themselves to be other than the language that constitutes them" (105). But this awareness only focuses, without resolving, Irigaray's dilemma. The patriarchal dystopian economy usurps all rhetoric, not just the oppositional, until speech, as well as silence, comes to mean consent. How can resistance be spoken if, as Monique Wittig asserts in Les Guérillères, "the language you speak is made up of words that are killing you" (114)?

Native Tongue and The Judas Rose: In the chinks of the word machine

This is the paradox that inspired Suzette Haden Elgin, as she attests in "Women's Language and Near Future Science Fiction," to begin work on her novel Native Tongue. The theorizations of Cixous, Irigaray, Adrienne Rich, and Mary Daly all rest, Elgin found, upon the essential contradiction that if existing languages are "inadequate to express the perceptions of women, then the only mechanism available to women for explaining this situation and for working with it was the very language that was inadequate" (177).[1]

The hypothetically self-perpetuating Moëbius strip formed by this contradiction provides the paradoxical "closed loop" model of language and reality around which Elgin structures Native Tongue and The Judas Rose. The reality reflected by language is shaped by language; the perceptions that language express are configured by language. Sally Robinson argues that even patriarchal language has within it "a feminine territory," a "space that has been repressed in and by phallocentric discourse" (106); Elgin's novels, however, postulate that there is no available space for the expression of women's perception in any patriarchal tongue, since language has been in both its surface manifestations and its deep structures contaminated by the inimical reality that an inimical language creates.

The problems posed by this argument, as metaphorically compelling as it is, are reflected in some of the contradictions and inconsistencies informing the two novels. Leaving aside the intrinsic difficulties of inquiring meta-linguistically into the workings of language, there are more profound complications implicit in the literalization of the idea that language does not merely echo or reflect but creates reality. Láadan is a clandestine language invented by linguist women in order to express those women's perceptions that are devalued or ignored by patriarchal language. If language structures rather than reflects reality, however, which is the premise upon which Elgin founds her novels, how can a women's reality exist before there is a language to structure it? How can the lexicon of Láadan even come into being? The vocabulary of the women's language is not meant to be, as the linguist women who create Láadan insist, a mere translation of English or "Panglish," but is intended to bring into being entirely new and previously unlexicalized concepts that have never been recognized or allowed in any patriarchal language. Where, then, do these concepts exist before they have been brought into expression? If language does structure reality, where does women's reality exist before the idea of a women's language existed?

Elgin attempts to answer these questions through her mystification of the process of language creation. Láadan is not a language that has been invented or made up so much as engendered; concepts are born through Elgin's specialized version of linguistic "Encoding," an almost mystical process of uncovering new semantic forms where none have been before. The secret Láadan language text, Manual for Beginners, distinguishes between "encodings" and "Encodings": "encoding" refers to "the way that human beings choose a particular chunk of their world, external or internal, and assign that chunk a surface shape that will be its name"; it describes, in short, "the process of word-making" (Native 22). Capital-E "Encoding," however, refers to something different, to the

> making of a name for a chunk of the world that . . . has never been chosen for naming before in any human language, . . . a chunk that has been around a long time but has never before impressed anyone as sufficiently important to deserve its own name. (Native 22)

While lower-case "encodings" can be systematically worked out, by creating counterparts in one language of words already found in another, there is, the Manual asserts, "No way at all to search systematically for capital-E Encodings":

> They come to you out of nowhere and you realize that you

> have always needed them; but you can't go looking for them, and they don't turn up as concrete entities neatly marked off for you and flashing NAME ME. They are therefore very precious. (22)

Such Encodings include perceptions such as the "Langlish" lexicalization formulated by eleven-year old Nazareth Chornyak in Native Tongue: "To refrain from asking, with evil intentions; especially when it's clear that someone badly wants you to ask--for example, when someone wants to be asked about their state of mind or health and clearly wants to talk about it" (29).[2] As Elgin represents it, the vocabulary of Láadan seems mystically to pre-exist, like the earth before the Creation, without form and void; "Encodings" exist in a realm that is poised somewhere between the material and the immaterial. They are summoned out of the void by the Encoder: but if Naming begets Being, from whence do these "found" lexical concepts emerge?

This paradox is a part of the closed loop of language's relation to reality, a loop in which Elgin and her readers inevitably find themselves entangled. Elgin presents patriarchal language as paradigmatically exclusive for those outside the loop, and perpetually entrapping for those within it. This is reflected in the final image with which Elgin closes Native Tongue. The brilliant computer programmer Lanky Pugh, driven slowly insane by the monstrous government and military experiments in which he reluctantly participates, watches captive whales swimming in the Interface:

> One of the things he planned to do, before he left this fancy hell, was figure out how to get into the Interface and go for a swim with those whales in that beautiful blue water. Round and round and round, in a lovely endless loop. (301)

The endless loop of which Lanky Pugh dreams ends the chapter by cycling metaphorically back to its own beginning, the computer-language poem that sets up another self-perpetuating loop: "10 REM HERE WE GO AGAIN / 20 GOTO 10" (298). As Mary Kay Bray points out in "The Naming of Things: Men and Women, Language and Reality in Suzette Haden Elgin's Native Tongue," this is also the chapter in which "the government project to Interface human infants is reincarnated in one more form," suggesting yet another endlessly perpetuating, static, and ultimately meaningless loop (55).

The recurring image of the loop functions as a challenge to the idea of linearity with which Elgin associates patriarchal language. Individual chapters and sub-plots tend to be cyclic and circular in their narrative arrangement: the flash-forward and flash-back techniques in Native Tongue, for example, move us backwards and forwards to key incidents in the life of Nazareth Chornyak, punctuating the birth-to-death linearity of human life with the disruptive and chaotic patterns of memory. The narrative deposits us, with what often appears randomness, at different junctures in Nazareth's life, so that the "plot" of the development and dispersal of Láadan is inextricably entwined with the plots of the linguist women. Linear narrative focus is further challenged by the text's fragmentation: not only do we move in a disorderly way though Nazareth's life, but we also enter so many alternative consciousnesses, of other protagonists and antagonists, that linearity and even identity is confounded.

Lucie Armitt reads Native Tongue as a "critique of linearity" ("Word" 134) that expands Irigaray's critique of linguistic linearity as "patriarchal in conception," an "extension of the patterns of binary logic so prevalent in the intellectual foundations of our society and our language" ("Word" 133). In many respects, Native Tongue and The Judas Rose are concerned with the exploitation and violation of the linear. They are novels concerned with literally and metaphorically crossing thresholds and barriers; it is no accident, therefore, that Elgin's dynastic linguist families are known as "the Lines." If this label does not make Elgin's concern with the linear clear enough, Nazareth Chornyak delimits it further in her journals, the private record which Elgin repeatedly juxtaposes against the fallacious but authoritative public record. "It was a time," Nazareth observes in the document "alleged" to be her diary, "when there was no splendour"; when

> the seamless fabric of reality had been subjected to an artificial process: dividing it up into dull little

> parts, each one drearier than the one before. And uniformly dreary, getting drearier and drearier by a man-made rule. As if you drew lines in the air, you perceive, and then devoted your life to behaving as if those air-territories bounded by your lines were real. It was a time from which all joy, all glory, all radiance had been systemically excluded. (Native Tongue 284)

Láadan is intended to cross many repressive lines, including the lines restricting women's lives. Its inception as a secret revolutionary weapon, a revolting language, represents a literal speech-act which shatters the rules of patriarchal language.

Armitt, who makes a similar point, sees Elgin's attack on linearity as ultimately a failure. The "political implications of syntactic structures" are not, Armitt claims, "concretised within the narrative form" of Native Tongue ("Word" 135). Therefore, she argues, Native Tongue suffers from a "polarising of language as dialogic and language as literary medium" which "oversimplifies, and thus reduces, the impact of feminist theories of the importance of language as a means to change" (135). Although Elgin has been criticized elsewhere on the charge of oversimplification (Julia Penelope, for example, sees Elgin's popular The Gentle Art of Verbal Self-Defence series as dangerous because it persuades women that they can simply re-imagine their reality rather than working to change it), Armitt concludes that Elgin's failure lies in both the form of her narrative and the form of her language. Since Láadan uses words which, Armitt says, "imply a verb-like function" (135), Elgin violates her position that "there would be no particular reason to expect that . . . [alternative] languages would have verbs, subjects, or objects" (Armitt 134): "The existence of a term [in Láadan] which at least approximates to a verb without any syntactical context denoting otherwise . . . suggests a reassertion of the patrilinear form rather than a movement away from it" (135). Armitt similarly criticizes Native Tongue for a failure of form. By relying on a conservative narrative format, Armitt implies, Elgin undermines her own premises. Ostensibly, Elgin should have adopted a more unconventional form: "If [Elgin's] aim really is to challenge the linguistic structures upon which patriarchal society is based, this aim," Armitt insists, "must be demonstrated through the structures of narrative" (136).

Although it is true that Native Tongue and The Judas Rose are not as structurally innovative as The Female Man, or June Arnold's Applesauce or Mary Staton's From the Legend of Biel (examples of more overtly experimental narratives that are approvingly cited by Armitt) Elgin's novels are, in their very conventional play, more unconventional than Armitt acknowledges. Even their conventionality, within a literary genre dedicated to iconographic replication, shares an avant-garde sensibility. Native Tongue and The Judas Rose indulge in what Leslie Dick calls the "raiding" and "salvaging" practices of postmodern writing; they plunder generic conventions in order to subvert them. While Native Tongue is, in some senses, not formally innovative, emerging "from the contexts of a well-developed subgenre and a well-developed critical discourse related to women in both science fiction and mainstream fiction" (Bray 49), its disruption of the boundaries between the fictional and the "real," its self-referentiality, and its disruption of the documentary all endow Native Tongue with an enigmatic metafictionality that poses, I would argue, the kind of anti-patrilinear logic that Armitt demands.

Patrilinear logic is challenged, in particular, in Elgin's simultaneous appeal to and refutation of the authority of the documentary. Elgin's narrative strategies, and her subversion of documentary authority, are based upon her manipulation of textual uncertainty and estrangement. Chapter epigraphs, in particular, provide a polyphonic accompaniment to the discursive unfolding of plot in the chapters proper. The epigraphs draw from varied sources: the oral as well as the written, the public record as well as the private, the credible as well as the suspect. They intersperse sensational and blatantly falsified documentaries, as in the faked "exposé" of the Linguist Households on tabloid radio, with the sombre authoritative prose of academic textbooks and the imposing vocabulary of scientific discourse. The texts' ritual debunking of doxa is thus accomplished on two levels, since the discursive fields of both "high" and "low" art, of hard science and urban mythology, all appeal to an evidently spurious authority.[3] The conflation of authentic and obviously meretricious sources thus disrupts and disqualifies the documentary as a source of truth.

While their narrative hybridization, their derogation of truth-sources, and their effacement of the distinction between high and low culture are all strategies based in the crossing and confusion of boundaries, Native Tongue and The Judas Rose most especially share a postmodern political sensibility in their treatment of the workings of language. Postmodern narrative is political, as Linda Hutcheon argues, in that it critiques the effects of what Fredric Jameson calls the "cultural logic of late capitalism" while "never pretending to be able to operate outside them" (Politics 25). While language may criticize the patriarchal order, it can never speak outside it. The paradoxical corollary to Elgin's linguistic paradox is that Native Tongue and The Judas Rose are written in English, not in Láadan. We are unable to conceive of what they might look like (or sound like, or mean) were they written in Láadan. As Janet Evason says in The Female Man, "this is your translation" (18).

Native Tongue and The Judas Rose both employ narrative tactics of "plunder and purloinment, plagiarism [and] replication" (Dick 206). But perhaps the most significant narrative feature of Native Tongue and The Judas Rose is their dependence on transgression and trespass. Elgin sets up series of lines with the assumption that lines are there to be crossed. The success of the women's secret development of Láadan depends upon their crossing the lines of acceptable womanly behaviour; their dissemination (ex-uterization?) of the language depends on crossing the lines of segregation between the linguist Lines and non-linguist laity, lines that, by the end of The Judas Rose, have started to dissolve.

The dissolution of boundaries and the transgressive crossing of thresholds reflects, as well, Elgin's concern with plurality over unity. This concern is voiced, in Native Tongue and The Judas Rose, by the linguist women who value Láadan not as an exclusive, private language but as one that shatters hegemony in all its structures. Unlike many clandestine codes, such as the arcane customs of private clubs and secret societies, Láadan is kept secret only in order to preserve it: its ultimate goal is not exclusivity but inclusivity. The intention of the linguist women is to one day transcend Láadan's secrecy and make it universally available; to this end it has been carefully constructed only out of syllables that are easy to pronounce for all Earth women, not merely those of European genesis, and it has a corresponding sign vocabulary for the hearing-impaired.

Láadan's valuation of plurality over singularity is reflected even in the narrative organization of the novels.

Native Tongue and The Judas Rose share an extremely fragmented, episodic narrative design. Structural holes must be filled in by readers who are forced either to bear with analeptic gaps in the plot or to "imagine whatever intervening narrative seems necessary" (Bray 56). The only character constant to both novels is Nazareth Chornyak who, over the course of her long life, acts as a narrative anchor holding together the multiplicity of narrative cords. The multivocality of the plethora of characters who briefly appear upon the stage and then depart splinters the apparent consistency of the third-person narrative chronicler who impassively recounts unfolding events. Like The Female Man, the narration of Native Tongue and The Judas Rose is schizophrenic. Unlike The Female Man, however, in which individual narrative voices, despite their unique qualities, are sometimes undistinguished and undistinguishable, Elgin's novels force us to inhabit discrete and opposed narrative consciousnesses: we spend time in the minds of male as well as female linguists, laity as well as Line members, antagonistic as well as sympathetic figures. This can be profoundly unsettling. Such textual fragmentation, lurking as it does beneath an apparently coherent textual surface, challenges patriarchal culture's insistence on singularity, just as Láadan challenges the linguistic primacy of singularity.

Elgin portrays the drive to colonize space as an extension of patriarchal culture's commitment to the defence and furtherance of its own singularity. In The Judas Rose, Heykus Clete exemplifies this in his monomaniacal promotion of celestial imperialism; he conquers the galaxy in order to protect Protestant Christianity from the "godless" regimes of foreign cultures. The multiplicity of cultures represented by the numerous Alien races is an affront to Earth governments in their very difference: while they are willing to plunder Alien cultures for their technologies, they are revolted by the fact of their difference. Native Tongue's reproduction of a recorded interview with a "U.S. Department liaison staffer" makes this clear: "I suppose every single one of us that comes here," says the anonymous government representative,

> knowing that his work will mean contact with extraterrestrials, thinks that he will be an exception, that he'll find a way to make friends with at least some of them. . . . But when the time comes, and you get close to an Alien, you understand what the scientists are taking about when they say it isn't possible. . . . Everything goes on red alert, and everything you've got to feel with is screaming ALIEN! ALIEN! (45)

The "patriarchal universe of discourse," a term used by language theorist Julia Penelope to indicate the paradigmatic universe created by the linguistic options of patriarchal language, is thus established on the principle of exclusion.

The Other is demonized, marked with the sign of difference ("ALIEN! ALIEN!"), and then either excluded or assimilated through an expropriative colonization.[4]

Despite their dependence on the Aliens, or perhaps because of it, the citizens of Earth harbour a dislike that amounts to repulsion for the extra-terrestrials with whom they negotiate. Even the term "extra-terrestrial" clearly establishes the grounding of the colonial enterprise in a sense of hegemonic identity; like any imperial power, Earth places itself squarely at the centre of the cosmic map.

The aversion of the citizens of Earth to the Aliens is more, however, than a testimony to Terran xenophobia or to the hegemonic nature of imperialism. It is also a synecdoche of the dystopian male's aversion to women, who are the small and recognizable "other" standing as a protective barrier before the larger and unknowable "Other." Just as they feel superior to the Aliens, who supply Earth with Alien technologies far superior to those of Earth, Earth men feel a sense of superiority to women that is never undermined by any humbling sense of dependence. They are able, for example, to hold in their minds the contradictory ideas that "their" women are entirely economically dependent on them, and that women's wages belong by right to the male heads of households.

Notably, Elgin does not portray women as being as repulsed by the Aliens as men are, perhaps because of an instinctive appreciation on the part of the women for their similarly ex-centric roles. In The Judas Rose, the nurse Jo-Bethany adapts to the Alien presence with comparative ease, thinking that "they were not that horrible," while her brother-in-law Ham Klander reacts with terror, hostility, and revulsion (227). After a confrontation with Ham, Jo-Bethany vomits abjectly, recognizing that what she feels for her brother-in-law is the total abhorrence she does not feel for the Aliens:

> Four arms, she could understand. . . . Ham Klander, on the other hand, was an absolute mystery. How could there be something like Ham Klander? And it survive, and flourish? . . . . this man, of her own species. (233)

While men label women as "Other," in these novels, women see men as the true aliens. Elgin confesses in an interview in Women of Vision that she sees even her own male characters as mysterious aliens who can be understood only "in the Skinnerian sense" (64). "Most of the things men do and say mystify me," Elgin comments: "they might as well be sentient gas clouds" (64).

The male body is thus constructed as alien in Native Tongue and The Judas Rose, and Elgin reinforces this with scenes equating male sexuality with bestiality. Ham Klander, whose name, with its ironic echo of "clan member," underscores Jo-Bethany's sense of her philogeneric distance from him, sees himself as "the Big Bull of the Pampas" in the boudoir (225). Sexuality thus becomes a kind of inter-species miscegenation that is consistently represented in these novels as appalling and unnatural.

Elgin's association of the male with the alien points to the ways in which patriarchal language typically constructs the female body, particularly its sexual organs, as alien, unnatural, or grotesque. Through the "ugly words" of phallocentric language, women are alienated from their own flesh (Judas Rose 293). Because the words for the female body are either clinical or vulgar, women are taught to see their bodies in clinical or vulgar terms. Part of Láadan's revolutionary potential lies in its ability to explode the boundaries created by old languages through implementing new ones. This has particularly radical consequences for the linguistic construction of the body. If the human body is sub-divided by linguistically-imposed perimeters, then inventing a new vocabulary of the body negates old boundaries by revealing them as arbitrary and relative; a new language re-draws the map of the body through original and originary lexical encodings. "When you look at a another person, what do you see?" inquires the anonymous author of "The Discourse of the Three Marys":

> Two arms, two legs, a continuous surface of the body, a space that begins with the inside flesh of the fingers and continue [sic] over the palm of the hand and up the inner side of the arm to the bend of the elbow. . . . I will name that the "athad" of the person. . . . Where

> there was no athad before, there will always be one now, because you will perceive the athad of every person you look at. . . . now it exists. (Native 242)

The body can thus, through language, be both deconstructed and re-constructed, the word made (re-anatomized) flesh.

Because of this transformative and transformational power, language is, according to the "Discourse of the Three Marys," magic (242). The implications of this linguistic strategy for a feminist reclamation of the oppressed body are far-reaching; such a strategy offers the possibility of de-centring the phallus and defining a new feminine bodily locus through a newly gynaecological grammar. If the idea of the body can be created and re-created out of magical new parts, not only is the consensual reality that privileged the phallus compromised, as Elgin postulates all reality is transformed through language, but the phallus itself as omnipotent and omnipresent Magic Wand magically disappears.

Through the revised liminality of the body's map, the body breaks apart into plurality and pluralities. The singular dominion of the phallus is threatened and the monolithic morphology of the phallus-centred body returns to that fragmentary and fragmented self that Lacan postulates as characteristic of the pre-mirror, pre-language stage of development. The pre-mirror stage, for the infant as yet lacking subjectivity, identity, or "self," is distinguished by the experience of fragmentation: the "voice and gaze of the primordial Other" are introjected by the infant who is "unable to maintain the organism in a tensionless state of constancy" (Lorraine 31). The infant merges with everything around her, because she has as yet no sense of the "Ideal-I" (Lacan, "Mirror" 2) with which to distinguish herself from the fragmentary images around her. In the pre-mirror stage the infant has not yet differentiated herself from external objects of pleasure, and therefore perceives herself as self-sufficient, at one with the universe that meets her needs and supplies her desires.

In the mirror stage itself, however, the infant "assumes the image" of her reflection because "it is more pleasurable to feel one's self to be a functioning whole than a random array of discrete movements and sensations" (Lorraine 32). Lacan urges us to "understand the mirror stage _as an identification_ . . . namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" ("Mirror" 2). This "jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the _infans_ stage," Lacan states, exhibits

> the symbolic matrix in which the _I_ is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject. (2)

The "important point," Lacan contends, is that

> this form situates the agency of the ego, before its

> social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will only rejoin the coming-into-being (*le devenir*) of the subject asymptotically, whatever the success of the dialectical synthesis by which he must resolve as *I* his discordance with his own reality. (2)

The Lacanian dialectic of Self and Other is founded upon the illusory sense of wholeness experienced by the infant when she assumes the mirror image; this image persuades the infant of the existence of a unified self, superseding the fragmented collection of impulses and desires previously experienced. At the "irreducible core of the self," therefore, as Tamsin E. Lorraine argues, "lies a fiction of totality assumed from the outside that is later elaborated layer by layer in the dialectic of identification with the other" (33). The desire of the infant for "m(O)ther-fusion" is displaced onto the "cultural substitutions" that "disallow such fusion," and the ego is manufactured, layer by layer, in response (34).

Patriarchal language acquisition thus inducts the subject, Lacan suggests, from the amorphous world of fusion with the mother/other into a world divided between discrete Self and discrete Other.[5] Elgin, however, radically replaces the language of the Father with a *materna lingua* which perpetuates, rather than defeats, plurality. Lacan posits language as being inextricably within the realm of the Father, a consolatory prize to make up for the loss of the Mother and to replace the lost object(s) of desire with substitutionary words that suggest an illusory control over loss. In contrast, Elgin reinvents the entry into language, telling the maternal story of Láadan. Like Kristeva, Elgin postulates the maternal as a site of linguistic privilege rather than deprivation. Kristeva argues that the symbolic order, the order of language, culture, and law, is generally debarred to women; motherhood, however, because it provides, through the child, a (natural) link between woman and the (social) world, offers a privileged point of entry into the symbolic realm. This privileged entry is denied to men who, as non-mothers, experience the symbolic only in a problematized and discontinuous way.[6] In Elgin's novels, this is reflected in the fact that Láadan is denied to men and boys. Ostensibly, this is in order to protect the secret language, just as, for similar purposes of protection, it is originally kept secret from the girls and young women who still live in close quarters with the men. This necessity is regretted by the women, who dream of the day on which Láadan will freely be spoken by all. But the clear necessity of keeping Láadan a secret from the linguist men, who would understand its revolutionary potential and stamp it out, allows Elgin to sidestep an important question. If Láadan is a women's language, how will it change once it is no longer available only to and spoken only by women? And if, for the sake of Láadan's purity, it is reserved only for women, how will two separate realities--the reality constructed by patriarchal language and that constructed by Láadan--cohabit without self-destructing?

While Elgin's novels embrace and extend some of Kristeva's ideas on the recuperative power of the maternal, her situation of the genesis of Láadan in the Barren Houses offers an ironic revision of Kristeva's privileging of mothering over non-mothering women in relation to the symbolic. While Native Tongue's dystopian culture controls and appropriates all aspects of biological reproduction, Elgin allocates the birth of language to the ghettoized realm of the discarded, "infertile" women of the Barren Houses. This gesture at once privileges the maternal and radically reforms it to encompass more than the literally or biologically reproductive.

Láadan is conceived by a community of women through lexical Encodings that are "truly newborn to the universe of discourse" (Native Tongue 158). This birth creates not just a new language but a new genealogy of mothers and speakers that re-writes the Biblical catalogue of patriarch and primogeniture. This women's genealogy is made literal in Native Tongue, a secret history that is memorized and passed down and recited with reverence "like the Begats of the Bible":

> And Emily Jefferson Chornyak in her lifetime gave to us three Major Encodings and two Minor; and Marian Chornyak

> Shawnessey, that was sister to Fiona Chornyak Shawnessey, in her lifetime gave us three Major Encodings and nine Minor; and her sister Fiona Chornyak Shawnessey, in her lifetime . . . . " (159)

By considering women as bear-ers rather than repositories of language, and by creating a new maternal genealogy that subversively re-writes the old, Elgin reforms and re-forms the Oedipal language triangle. Its reformulation associates the maternal not with loss but with gain, with the expansion rather than the contraction of the universe of discourse. And, by re-writing the Biblical histories that support, as Spender argues all language does, the "visibility" of males at the expense of the invisibility of women (153), Elgin counters the "rarilh" tendency of written and oral history. "Rarilh" is Láadan's useful verb meaning "to "deliberately refrain from recording," as in, Elgin's Grammar explains, history's "failure to record the accomplishments of women" (117). By giving this repressive tendency a name of its own, Láadan rights and rewrites the wrongs of history.

In reconstituting the Oedipal language triangle, Elgin also retells the history of language acquisition. She locates the subject of language in a story in which language acquisition does not depend upon the loss of plurality and fragmentation, but upon the preservation and valuation of multiplicity. The autonomous, insistent "I" of the Lacanian speaking subject is replaced, in Láadan, with a subject that is far less rigorously and exclusively individual. The isolated "I" of the Lacanian Self is destabilized; the speaker is re-contextualized into a discursive community wherein speech exchange is dialogic rather than dialectic. It is impossible, for example, to structure a sentence in the grammar of Láadan that inflexibly privileges the perceptions of the speaker over those of the listener. The evidence morpheme "wa," for example, is integral to the structure of Láadan; it frames truth-statements in a form that builds into every sentence an automatic acknowledgement of subjectivity.[7]

This acknowledgement is so central to Láadan communication that, as the _Grammar_ makes clear, although it is technically possible to frame a sentence that did _not_ end in some form of the evidence morpheme, it "cannot easily be overlooked"; the absence will be read as "an overt statement of refusal to supply these forms" (31). The evidence morpheme is the final word of the Láadan sentence, and it qualifies the entire utterance by making clear "the basis upon which the utterance is offered" (131). They take forms such as "_wa_" ("known to X because perceived by X, externally or internally"); "_wi_" ("known to X because self-evident"); "_we_" ("perceived by X in a dream"); or "_wáa_" ("assumed true by X because X trusts source"). Such forms create an equality in discourse rather than a primacy of speaker or listener; while the evidence morpheme depletes, for example, the totalizing effect of the speaker's privilege, it also makes direct contradiction of the speaker's perception impossible (Grammar 131).

The importance of perception to Láadan's structure is clear from its morphological root, láa, from the Láadan world "láad," "to perceive" (Grammar 104). As Mary Kay Bray observes, the male linguists' insistence on the use of the verb "perceive" (rather than on "biased" sensory-based verbs such as "look here" or "listen here") compounds the irony in the lack of perception built into their own languages (54).

Láadan offers both new modes of perception for the body, by de-centring the phallus and re-allocating the body's linguistic boundaries, and new modes of expression for the delineation of these perceptions. Despite the radical implications of Láadan's linguistic re-conception(s) of the body, however, Elgin's paradigms of sexuality are frequently troubling. If Láadan is a revolutionary language intended to express the unique "perceptions of women" (Grammar 1), then the sexual lacunae of Native Tongue and The Judas Rose disturbingly imply that the body can be rewritten only in part(s). Láadan is meant to be a language which compensates for the "lexical gaps" inherent in patriarchal vocabulary (Graddol and Swann 110). Ironically, Native Tongue and The Judas Rose frequently reproduce those very gaps in their failure to provide a sexual lexicon that constructs female sexuality as other than frustrated, deceptive, unfulfilled, or inert.

Most notably, it is apparently only the perceptions and experiences of heterosexual women that merit Encodings of their own. Pre-existing heterosexual codes seem to negate the new bodily codes of sexual expression that should be available through a revolutionary women's language. This is a particularly curious omission in a language that has otherwise been designed to be as inclusive as possible: to be easily pronounced, for example, by non-European women. Peter Fitting in "The Turn from Utopia" and Kristine J. Anderson in "The Great Divorce" have shown Elgin's examples of female sexuality in Native Tongue to be based on deception and frustration. Neither, however, has extended the question to ask why, even within the segregated and relatively safe women's communities such as the Barren Houses (and it is significant that the only other women's community Elgin portrays is the chaste and asexual convent), women seem able to provide every form of comfort and necessity for each other except sexual release. Certain lines, it appears, cannot after all be crossed.

This is most graphically demonstrated in the twenty-third chapter of The Judas Rose, a parodically pastoral sexual interlude that recalls the bucolic language of the Old Testament's Twenty-third Psalm. Belle-Sharon, a young linguist wife (whose name perhaps alludes to the "Rose of Sharon" bride who narrates the most intensely sensual passages in the Song of Solomon), is revealed "in the broad firm bed of the rendezvous room, as carefully arranged for [her husband's] pleasure as an earth-wise plant arranged for sunlight or for rain" (292). Since the room in which they lie is underground, however, this phrasing resounds oddly: there is no sunlight, and the sound of rain on the roof comes from a recording. When Belle-Sharon's trained ear picks up the "hint of a hiss behind the rain" on the worn tape ("from too many men of the Lines fancying rain on the roof while they took their pleasure"), the fissure in the small illusion anticipates the imminent disintegration of the larger (296).

Unlike the language of fulfilment and satiation with which the Twenty-third Psalm is redolent, the language of The Judas Rose's twenty-third chapter is predicated on frustration, suppression, and deceit.[8] Belle-Sharon is not made to lie down in green pastures, but upon the cold bed of nuptial obligation. Although she has anointed her head for her husband's pleasure, as the Psalmist's head is anointed, she receives, unlike the Psalmist, no comfort from either rod or staff: neither, to her chagrin, does her cup overflow. Instead, she self-consciously moderates her body to make the act of intercourse "swifter and easier for him" (293), while meditating on words that, in their baldly anti-pastoral and anti-romantic sound, help to control her own arousal: "An ugly word, vagina, like that ugly word, penis. Their ugliness would serve her purpose" (293). Language punctures the romantic illusion of the rendezvous, but its deliberate deployment as an anti-aphrodisiac is nevertheless provocative.

As Peter Fitting notes, the techniques Belle-Sharon uses to suppress her own arousal are all linguistically-based ("Turn" 149). When Belle-Sharon first goes to Nazareth for advice on how to control her arousal, the older woman tells Belle-Sharon that, while the times tables can be effective, "the very best way" to avoid arousal is to "say the alphabet backward " (294).

While it is specifically Panglish and Alien alphabets, rather than Láadan, that are used to suppress desire, underlining the fact that in dystopia language itself is inevitably dystopian, it is also true that this scene happens close to the end of The Judas Rose, when Láadan is already being secretly taught and spoken. Why does Láadan, the magical language, offer no magical release?

As she competently fakes an orgasm, including convincing muscle spasms and dilated pupils, Belle-Sharon recalls the early years of her marriage, before she had learned the tricks that every linguist woman learns to defeat her own desire:

> The real pain--the pain that she had known too many times before she brought her body under control--was the pain of letting yourself truly take part in this act that Panglish called "sexual intercourse." . . . It had taken Belle-Sharon nearly six months to achieve fully the control that would spare her that pain, and there had been many nights when she had gone desperate and frantic back to Chornyak Womanhouse to be soothed and comforted

> by the other women, who had been through it themselves before her and who knew what she was enduring. (295)

The consolation offered by the other women, however, is very limited: it consists largely of the carrion comfort of being told that they, too, have suffered. The women of Barren House also proffer Belle-Sharon the solace of "bitter tea" and of being rocked "in gentle arms" until the tea drugs her into tumescent unconsciousness (295). Although Elgin's narrator adds as an afterthought that any woman could provide orgasms "easily enough for herself" (294-95), these slender masturbatory consolations are apparently a poor substitute for what it is hard to avoid calling, in an inevitable harkening back to Freud's glorification of the vaginal orgasm, the "real thing":

> There were some women, Belle-Sharon knew, who . . . woke the next morning still tumescent, to linger that way for days at a time, not eased even by the orgasms any woman could of course provide easily enough for herself. Poor loves, thought Belle-Sharon. Poor tormented loves. (295-96)

Poor loves indeed, if only the heterosexual orgasm is sufficient to "ease" them; in the continuing dystopia of Elgin's near-future America, informed by misogyny and fundamentalist sexual guilt, their chances of achieving one are slim.

It is difficult to comprehend how a language such as

Láadan, which provides such an extensive and refined vocabulary for so many permutations of human relations, offers no idiom for an act of physical love between women. Elgin portrays men, including linguist men, as uninterested in, if not incapable of, making these relational distinctions: they laugh at the little girl they overhear speaking Láadan, who explains "that what she felt for her brother was . . . 'love for the sibling of one's body but not of one's heart'" (276). The linguist men find this "just the kind of silly distinction a female would make" (276). These professional translators are dismissive of such linguistic refinements, but they are precisely the kind of refinements around which Láadan is structured.

Láadan differentiates, for example, between sets of love-nouns with distinctions that are highly particular and specific. It distinguishes between "azh" ("love for one sexually desired now") and "áazh" ("love for one sexually desired at one time, but not now"); or between "aye" ("love that is unwelcome and a burden") and "áayáa" ("mysterious love, not yet known to be welcome or unwelcome"); or between "ab" ("love for one liked but not respected"), "ad" ("love for one respected but not liked"), and "éeme" ("love for one neither liked nor respected") (Grammar 136). Why, then, does it offer no love-noun specific to a woman who (sexually) loves another woman? Even in the emancipatory tongue of Láadan, it appears, "the hand on its way to the clitoris of another woman," as West German poet Verena Stefan writes, "leads to a place that has no name" (qtd. in Bammer 71).

Julia Stanley, Susan Robbins, and Jane Mills, among others, have documented the limitations of English adequately to express women's sexual experience or to offer non-stigmatic names for the desiring woman. Stanley and Robbins note in "Sex-Marked Predicates" that, typically, verbs referring to sexual intercourse tend to be either gender-neutral or to require a male subject to complete them. There are, as well, no adequate words to describe the active role of women in intercourse: in English women "get" slang-sexed, rather than slang-sex others. Láadan offers two verbs for the sexual act itself. The first, "shim," means literally "to sex act," and is also, with extraordinary etymological clarity, the word for "two" (Grammar 120). The second verb is "lila," literally "to female-sex-act," which is morphologically related to "lil" for "water," and "lili," "to be wet" (Grammar 105). Láadan thus supplies the glaring English semantic deficiencies relating to the female sex act by offering new lexicalizations.

However, these lexicalizations are not unproblematic. For example, the Láadan word for lover, "lilahá," suggests a certain puzzling ambivalence: while "lilahá" can only be used for a female, never for a male subject, it leaves the object of that love uncertain. Is the female lover a lover of women or a lover of men? The Láadan lexicon's puzzling inclusion of words for vagina but not for clitoris might, at a stretch, suggest the latter. Moreover, the fact that there is no male form of "lilahá" implies that men are only able (to) "shim," to "sex-act"; in other words, a man may have sex but only a woman may be a lover. If heterosexuality is the only sexual option available in Láadan, the corollary fact is that men may have (female) lovers but women are doomed to have only (male) sex-ers. That only women earn/deserve the word "lover" is a dubious and costly privilege: women can be lovers but men can only be sex-ers, sex-actors (while, ironically, faking orgasm makes women sex-actresses). If this is true, and if Elgin does not offer lesbian sexuality as an alternative or an antidote, then it implies that women are doomed in perpetuum to the kind of sexual frustration that Belle-Sharon suffers. Even if subversively buried deep in the text or in the language, any representation of lesbian love suffers, in Native Tongue and The Judas Rose and in Láadan itself, from what Láadan construes as the verb "rarilh": to "deliberately refrain from recording" (First Grammar 117).

Láadan seems to offer women a materna lingua that can free them from the acquisition of language through loss, freeing them at the same time from the Freudian/Lacanian story of language. The novels' continual reversion to a heterosexuality grounded in the frustration and suppression of desire, however, returns the reader irrevocably to the old Oedipal plot, in which woman is eternally symbolized as lack and man eternally symbolized as "tout," the "whole that can fill the hole" (Lorraine 66). Láadan's lack of a truly revolutionary sexual vocabulary re-enmeshes Woman in the very Symbolic order from which Elgin's version of language acquisition tries to free her.

Sally Robinson observes that Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva reject "unity and 'sameness' as ideals of phallocentric systems of signification" that are bound into language entry (106). Native Tongue and The Judas Rose share a valorizing of plurality over singularity, the communal over the individual, and the ex-centric over the hegemonic. The contrasting patriarchal insistence on conformity at the cost of multiplicity is brutally enacted in one of the opening scenes of The Judas Rose. The young linguist woman Aquina is artificially inseminated by the women of the Chornyak Barren House, where women no longer fertile are exiled by the male linguists. It is among these "infertile" women that Láadan is conceived and that Aquina is impregnated in order to disseminate Láadan beyond the confines of the linguist compounds.

Aquina's pregnancy is the profane version of the Virgin Birth necessary to further the women's sacred crusade, just as Miriam Rose, her illegitimate offspring, is a saviour figure who unites both the New Testament Christ (in her immaculate conception) and the Old Testament Moses (in her name's recollection of Moses' sister Miriam). Aquina's own name recuperates the notorious misogyny of Thomas Aquinas, one of the patriarchal church's founding fathers, and designates Aquina as founding mother of the women's new dispensation. After she is impregnated, Aquina is smuggled into the Convent of the Sisters of Gertrude, a monastic order dedicated to the clandestine care of illicitly pregnant women. The nuns are steeped in the Church's tradition that birth must be penitential; women must bring forth their children, as Eve's doom in the book of Genesis makes clear, in pain and tears, a text the nuns take with chilling literality.[9] When Aquina stoically refuses to moan in labour, the Reverend Mother admonishes Aquina that she "must *scream*! For the sake of [her] immortal soul" (31). When the labouring woman is still stubbornly silent, the nuns resort to forcibly clamping her legs together while reciting scripture verses, until she "screamed quite satisfactorily" (32).

The Biblical *logos* is, in this context, translated into a physical stricture upon the body of the labouring woman; she is allowed no deliverance until she accedes to it. Her body is brutally held together, forcibly made singular, held "with her thighs tight together in a grip that even the frenzy of birth would not be able to loose," when all the natural urgencies of birth would have sundered her body, made it literally plural (32). Although acted out by women, it is the patriarchal word of the Church (an institution which Elgin portrays as unfailingly oppressive in its structure) that so constricts the birthing body.

Ironically, out of this monstrous delivery is born Sister Miriam Rose, the eponymous Judas Rose; she is a new saviour born through a new virgin birth, whose mission is to spread Láadan outside the Linguist households. A figure of transgression since her conception, Miriam Rose is born to cross (the) Lines, literally and metaphorically. Like Christ in the New Testament, Miriam Rose offers a new covenant, abandoning the death-dealing logos of the old dispensation for the salvific living word of the new.

The scene of Aquina's unnatural delivery in The Judas Rose is foreshadowed in Native Tongue by one of the series of imaginary "20th century 'feminist' poem[s]" (117) prefacing individual chapters in the text.[10] Linking explicitly the notions of language and birth, the untitled poem postulates another birth made monstrous through another monstrously delayed delivery. Pregnancy, the poem asserts, can "never come to term" because "there are no terms," because there is for women no language of release (116). Protracted and unproductive pregnancies breed monsters at the bottom of the amniotic sea, roaring like mutated seashells: "the surge of the damned unspeakable / being kept back" (116). The doubly "unbearable" foetus keeps "kicking, kicking / under the dura mater" (116). Since the only means of deliverance are the tools of an "infernal medicine" (the lamentably-phrased "forceps of the patriarchal paradigm"), the "ancient offspring" (117) cannot be born, and the bearing body petrifies, becomes "Stone [that] will not dilate / will not stretch / will not tear" (116).

The poem prefaces the chapter of Native Tongue that reveals the plot of Aquina Chornyak, ancestor of the Aquina who gives birth to Miriam Rose, to poison young Nazareth Chornyak. If lack of language perverts the process of birth, as in the prefatory poem, then the narrative of the chapter proper shows how the quest for language can pervert mothering: Aquina poisons Nazareth out of love for Láadan. As a child Nazareth is a linguistic prodigy, and Aquina secretly administers to her herbs that she hopes will make her sterile, so that Nazareth will be relegated early to the Barren House where she would be able to work on the secret language. Although the other women of Barren House repudiate Aquina's action, her willingness to render Nazareth physically infertile in order to secure her linguistic fecundity graphically demonstrates the strained connections between language and birth and the stresses which pervert those connections within the dystopian economy.

Patriarchal culture elaborates and perpetuates these stresses by its derogation of the maternal, a derogation that exists in tension with patriarchal valorization of birthing. In The Handmaid's Tale, Swastika Night, and The Gate to Women's Country, women are redeemed from their inherent carnality through the purification of birth; they earn their place by fulfilling their purpose. As the warriors say in The

Gate to Women's Country, "In bearing a son for a warrior, a woman earns her life" (143).

While women are meant to give birth to babies, however, any other form of fertility is suspect. Feminine linguistic creativity, in particular, is described in the language of the corrupt maternal. When the linguist women translate the King James Bible into Láadan, for example, the Catholic church castigates the translation as tainted with the heresy of goddess-worship. The evidence for their attack is grounded in their distrust of the maternal: in the Láadan version of the Psalms, God is seen as performing functions, such as the braiding of hair, that are seen as heretically feminine and motherly.

The Church's attack on such a translation labels the text an abomination that suggests at once the debased maternal and the improperly sexual. The priests' denunciations echo the language used by the American fundamentalist churches that similarly attacked, at the end of the nineteenth century, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's Woman's Bible. Stanton's revisionary text was called "that miserable abortion," an "impudent utterance of infidelity" (qtd.in DeBerg 1). It was seen, like the Láadan Bible, as a source of corruption and disease (DeBerg 123). Stanton herself was called a "reeking lepress," and any woman who listened to her or was exposed to her contaminated text needed, according to evangelist T. DeWitt Talmade, "to be washed, and for three weeks to be soaked in carbolic acid, and for a whole year fumigated, until she is fit for decent society" (qtd in DeBerg 1). The Catholic priests replicate this language in The Judas Rose when they talk of "smelling out" the "corrupted" nuns who have been exposed to the Láadan heresy.

The invention of Láadan is predicated on the faith that language has the power to change reality; as Nazareth Chornyak observes in her diaries, however, these changes occur at an often funereal pace, over generations and centuries, on the scale of what Nazareth calls "eternal time" (Judas Rose 292). Meanwhile, Láadan provides, to women awaiting the distant advent of the Kingdom Come, a more immediate inner utopian site, a place in which the problematic vision of a "women's reality," which Láadan is problematically expected to represent, can coexist with, without being overwritten by, patriarchal reality.

However, Elgin's re-formulations of Göedel's Theorem, from which she extrapolates the fictional premise of her novels, force us to question this co-existence. In "The Construction of Láadan," the introductory chapter to her First Dictionary and Grammar of Láadan, Elgin describes encountering Douglas Hofstadter's proposal, in Göedel, Escher, Bach, that "for every record player there were records it could not play because they would lead to its indirect self-destruction" (4). Elgin extends this hypothesis by, as she says, squaring and cubing it, to read as follows:

> REFORMULATION ONE, Göedel's Theorem: For any language, there are perceptions which it cannot express because they would result in its indirect self-destruction.
>
> REFORMULATION ONE-PRIME, Göedel's Theorem: For any culture, there are languages which it cannot use because they would result in its indirect self-destruction. (Native Tongue 145)

Why, then, once Láadan has begun to re-shape reality, as it begins to do even in Nazareth's lifetime, does neither patriarchal language nor patriarchal culture shatter? The fissures that appear in that reality are superficial rather than structural: the men are perhaps a little more courteous in their treatment of women, a phenomenon which could easily be explained by the fact that they are no longer living cheek-by-jowl in crowded, impoverished circumstances.

The dynamics of the linguists' communities can be confusing. Like the deception-within-deception embeddings of plots perpetuated by women in furthering the cause of Láadan and men in furthering the cause of their personal power, the linguists of the Lines dwell in isolation-within-isolation. Since the historical Anti-Linguist Riots, each of the Linguist households has been quarantined in self-sufficient fortress-like underground compounds; individual cells of living quarters are completely soundproofed, creating, even in the vastly overcrowded conditions of the households, the illusion of isolation. Elgin thus literally reflects the metaphorical incompatibility of the separate realities inhabited by men and women in the extreme segregation of the linguists' living arrangements.

Even before the building of the segregated Womanhouses, when men and women marry and cohabit and interact socially, all intercourse occurs within a network of social and cultural constraints such that they might as well be residing on different planets. Women, for example, may not travel in public unless accompanied by a male chaperone, and even within their own households they must show passes to move about and must be able to account for their whereabouts and actions to any male householder. The restraints under which Elgin's women labour are, like the circumstances of women in all the dystopias under consideration here, only thinly-disguised extensions of the less overt restrictions implicit in the lives of past and present as well as future women; Native Tongue and The Judas Rose explicate women's historical and cultural oppression by making it literal.

At the end of Native Tongue, the linguist men decide to remove the women from their homes into separate, segregated "Womanhouses."[11] This change comes about because Láadan has begun to be spoken among the women and taught to the small girls, and is creating the kind of Göedelian resonance that affects reality. The women have become "always serene, always compliant, always courteous, always respectful," and the men, as a result, cannot bear to have them around (289). Although at first the linguist men congratulate themselves that the slow process of "socialization" has at last overcome the old "feminist corruption" (275), they soon resort to exiling the women, who have turned into the kind of obedient and attentive androids the men profess to have wanted. One disturbing aspect of this change is that the novel only inconsistently presents this change in female temperament as an act--a deliberate deceptive strategy--on the women's part; it seems at least in part to be presented as a natural evolutionary process resulting from the implementation of the new language. This echoes eerily the devolutionary process experienced by the women in Burdekin's Swastika Night; the blank face of the bovine breeding woman is not a mask but an accurate reflection of her inner emptiness. The question of agency is therefore complicated, and the struggle for primacy between nature and culture reinvoked.

By the end of The Judas Rose, the linguist women are still living in a state of semi-apartheid in the segregated Womanhouses. This state sometimes seems desirable not so much in that it provides a secret place for Láadan to flourish as because it spares women the annoying attentions of the men. Men and women marry but live apart, arranging appointments for purposes of sexual congress. Since some women must stay in the main households of the compound in order to raise the children and see to the "women's" work, clearly defined lines of separation are never established, despite the men's repeated attempts to do so.

The material segregation of the sexes is hopelessly confused and compromised, in The Judas Rose, by practical necessity and by habits of intercourse. The immaterial segregation of linguistically-constructed reality, however, is complete. Moreover, this segregation looks as if will continue indefinitely; women are agreed that, at least for the present, it is too dangerous to teach even male infants Láadan. Thus we are left with two physically intersecting but metaphysically isolated circles. Women have cultivated "their own reality, far from the consciousness if not the . . . presence of men," but "men's reality is not transformed in any way and continues to dominate the world at large" (Anderson 92).

Despite this, the women's communities of the Barren Houses and Womanhouses aspire always to reconciliation and reunion. The patience, self-sacrifice, and good faith the women display in this desire conflict oddly, however, with the deceptive and manipulative means they use to achieve it. In a letter to Kristine J. Anderson, Elgin challenges the women's ideal of re-integration, and even, by implication, the ideal of a separate but peaceful coexistence, a "shared reality that is mutually tolerable":

> I am convinced that unless there is drastic change only two futures are possible: 1) The subordination of one gender to the other in all things, with male dominance

> the more probable; and 2) a total, or nearly total, separation of the two genders. Neither prospect is pleasant, I know. But they are the alternatives I see. . . . (qtd. in Anderson 93)

These alternatives are ultimately left open by the novels' lack of narrative closure. The lack of closure in The Judas Rose, especially, is textually anarchic; it broadens the question of the survival of women and Láadan into the question of the survival of the planet and the human race. The novel ends with the sudden and unheralded appearance of the cosmic Consortium, an obscure but omnipotent interplanetary judicial body whose agents have secretly been observing Earth and who are in the process of deciding whether to quarantine or destroy the planet. The abrupt narrative departure from the cloistered spaces of convent and compound to a universe from which Earth is suddenly, radically decentred suggests the presence of a deep-seated textual ambivalence about the possibilities, linguistic or otherwise, for reform and redemption.

Part of this ambivalence is located in the tension between the Epilogue that nominally concludes the two texts and the prefatory devices which inaugurate them. The Judas Rose ends with a final document that radically recontextualizes the narrative critique of documentary truth throughout the texts. Labelled as a report to "The Council of the Consortium" on "the problem of Earth," the document calls for the Council's immediate decision on whether to destroy Earth or to allow time for "the females of Earth" to try and hasten the evolution of the species before it self-destructs. "Among the females," writes agent "XJHi," there are those who "do understand the mechanisms of change and have the courage and resolve to set them in motion" (362). The evolutionary process, however, is moving with "a slowness that is not encouraging" (362). The report ends with a call for immediate action, an action left undetermined by the very document that urges it.

This indeterminacy is compounded by the Prefaces introducing both texts. The Prefaces, which outline the publication process of the anonymous manuscripts called "Native Tongue" and "The Judas Rose," written and funded by equally mysterious and possibly different sources, ostensibly draw attention to the novel as novel, rather than history or textbook. Fictional boundaries are further distorted through the implied statement that the Preface itself is therefore factual, not fictional. While critics such as Peter Fitting have therefore read Native Tongue's Preface as suggesting that the world has returned to normal, and the oppression of women has ended, it seems to me that it is as dangerous to do this as to take the "Historical Notes" of The Handmaid's Tale at face value. Elgin's Prefaces, like the "Historical Notes," and like the revised American Constitution that disenfranchises women at the beginning of Native Tongue's first chapter, lure readers beyond the "fictional boundaries" of the novels (Bray 51).

Some critics assume that the oppressive regime of Elgin's future America has been obviated by the fact that the novel has been published and Láadan has clearly spread beyond the Lines, as was the linguist women's goal. But if this is the case, has language in fact changed reality in any significant respect, as the linguist women believe it must and as the novels' central premise asserts? It is true that the Preface is signed by Patricia Ann Wilkins, the editor of the "Native Tongue" manuscript. If a woman can rise to the lofty rank of Executive Editor, the circumstances of woman's lives must be at least somewhat ameliorated compared to those portrayed in Elgin's America, in which women can hold, as the revised Constitution which begins Chapter One makes clear, no position of power or responsibility. However, as in Atwood's "Historical Notes," there are enough suggestions of a continuing, if less blatant, oppression of women that, again as in The Handmaid's Tale, all that is finally demonstrated is that historical periods and political regimes may come and go, but patriarchy endures forever.

In The Judas Rose this is echoed explicitly in a chapter preface purporting to be an excerpt from a paper refuting the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis from a fictional academic conference; the document is identified as "from a paper presented at the annual Exotica Colloquium of the Department of Language

Sciences, California Multiversity" by "Associate Professor John "Norm" Smith of Stanford University" (161). Elgin's use of names, especially those of experts and authorities, is frequently playful and parodic, as in the case of the lecturer on female religious hysteria named Krat Lourde. In this case Elgin presents a professor with a name as conventional and archetypal as "John Smith," who appends the nickname "Norm" to a paper defending the norm of received linguistic doctrine. Elgin's rather jaundiced view of academia, in both in her fiction and non-fiction,[12] suggests that the collaboration of groups such as "The Historical Society of Earth," "WOMANTALK, Earth Section," "The Metaguild of Lay Linguists, Earth Section," and "The Láadan Group" is hardly an automatic guarantor of the reclaimed universe that Fitting sees implicit in these groups' joint publication of Native Tongue as an historical curiosity. After all, the authoritarian voices of educated experts and their campaigns of misinformation punctuate the narrative throughout Native Tongue and The Judas Rose. The specialized academic groups called "feminologists" and the extensive textual citation from "feminology" textbooks does little to suggest that women or feminists play an important role in Elgin's dystopian America--quite the opposite. Why should a living and vital language be relegated to the exotic language section of an academic colloquium? Such an allocation violates the very premises of use and dissemination upon which Láadan was founded. It is clearly extremely hazardous to read the Preface of either novel without an ironic awareness of the source of the text and those who publish and purvey it.

The anti-evolutionary, entropic force of history is thus presented as a frame-tale device which ultimately constricts the revolutionary possibilities even of language. Just as Atwood's "Historical Notes" return the text to an eternal dystopian moment, so the frames of Preface and Council Report establish the very closed loop that Elgin's language is meant to shatter. Even a revolting language is frozen and debilitated within the frame of history.

While Láadan is originally conceived as a language that can redeem, for women, both the cultural and the physical, the immaterial and the material, Elgin's novels finally suggest, albeit inadvertently, that Láadan fails at both. I say inadvertently because Elgin demonstrates a faith in the potential of Láadan that rivals Nazareth Chornyak's. Elgin has done her utmost to move Láadan beyond the bounds of the fictional: by offering readers instructional audiotapes, by publishing a Grammar of the language, and by inviting women to write to her with new linguistic "Encodings" for Láadan, she displaces the borders between "story" and "reality" in a way that few writers attempt. I sympathize with Elgin's utopian project, in part because the plot I had first conceived for this dissertation was itself rather utopian.

I originally intended to arrange my discussion in such a way that it would portray a movement from the negation of resistance to the completion of resistance through language. In novels by Margaret Atwood, Suzy McKee Charnas, and Katharine Burdekin, I recognized the representation of a dystopian Manicheeism that negated resistance, repressing the resisting body by impressing upon it the incontestable mark(s) of ownership. In novels by Sheri S. Tepper and Joanna Russ, I saw an increased ambivalence about the body. In these two dystopian texts it is necessary to mediate, negotiate, compromise the body in order to effect resistance; such strategies, however, generate a commensurate alienation from the resisting body. Agency is thus possible but compromised, just as the revolting body itself is compromised. In Native Tongue and The Judas Rose, I was prepared to find that language transcended flesh and offered hope for an immaculate resistance through a recovered and recuperated body. I intended my textual continuum to progress neatly from the violent repudiation to the triumphant vindication of the flesh.

Needless to say, my plot failed. While struggling with the contradictions and complications of Elgin's novels, and while diverting much of my energy towards trying to repair or disguise them, I came to the conclusion that Elgin's reach towards a language of redemption does not after all propose, as I had originally titled this chapter, the Body Spoken. What it does offer is an adumbrated body, shadowy and sketchy, etched out not by the answers but by the questions and paradoxes that Elgin's novels delineate. And, as with all of the representations of resistance considered herein, paradox and indeterminacy have ultimately tendered a far more fertile field for speculation than the orderly equations I had first envisioned. In the end, resistance remains, in each of these novels, uniquely in the register of adumbration.

Notes to Chapter Four

1.Marlene Barr has examined this paradox as it influences feminist critical writing; not only does a lack of adequate language hamper writing, it hampers writing about writing. Barr observes: "Presently, I must be understood by fitting my ideas to a pre-existing patriarchal linguistic system, a system which articulates feminist notions according to a tag-along status in its systematic working. Despite the limitations of the arbitrary patriarchal linguistic reality, however, I can still wonder about how "feminist fabulation" [Barr's critical label for feminist speculative writing] might appear when translated into Láadan." ("Playing" 189).

2.Further examples of Láadan Encodings are found in the brief glossaries appended to the novels and in Elgin's _A First Dictionary and Grammar of Láadan_.

3.See Linda Hutcheon, _The Politics of Postmodernism_, for further discussion on the "de-doxifying" properties of postmodernism. Hutcheon employs Barthes'concept of the _doxa_ as received public opinion or popular consensus.

4. Elgin deploys the iconographic speculative trope of "terraforming" as one aspect of colonizing practice. The conquering of space as the "final frontier" is a hallowed speculative tradition; Elgin critiques it by linking it with exaggeratedly masculinist displays of dominance and aggression

such as Heykus Clete's monomaniacal drive for endless expansion. Defying generic conventions, she represents Earth's imperialistic drive as childish rather than grandiose.

5.See Lacan's writing on the Mirror Stage of psychosexual development in Écrits, 1-7; for commentary on Lacan, see Jane Gallop, Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction, Kaja Silverman, The Subject of Semiotics, and Tamsin E. Lorraine, Gender, Identity, and the Production of Meaning.

6.For Kristeva's analysis of the relationship of the maternal to the symbolic, see "Un Nouveau Type d'intellectuel: Le dissident" and ""Héréthique de l'amour" in Tel Quel 74 (Winter 1977).

7.Láadan builds an acknowledgement of the speaker's subjectivity into every utterance. Elgin's work suggests that the more authoritarian or institutional the language, the more the subjectivity of the speaker is obscured; she especially emphasizes this in her satirical treatment of the institutionalized and repressive uses of religious language. One of the young nuns at Saint Gertrude's, for example, is harshly accused of "the sin of subjectivity" (Judas Rose 27). Compare this to Samuel R. Delany's Babel-17, in which a highly militarized language works as a thought-control weapon by destroying the subjectivity of the speaker through its negation of any possible linguistic expression of an "I."

8.In The Judas Rose, the Twenty-third Psalm is one of the first passages translated by the Linguist women from the King James Bible into Láadan; it is used as a source of clandestine outreach to purvey Laadan to non-linguist women through the medium of women's devotional services. Elgin's First Dictionary and Grammar of Laadan also offers a complete translation of this psalm.

9.For a discussion on the eighteenth-century debate surrounding use of ether as anaesthetic in childbirth, originally opposed because it violated the scriptural tenet that women must bear children in suffering in order to obviate Eve's original sin, see Mary Poovey, "Scenes of an Indelicate Character: The Medical Treatment of Victorian Women" in Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England.

10.The terms "feminist" and "feminism" are consistently placed in quotation marks in Native Tongue and The Judas Rose, indicating the apparent lack of cultural belief in such a phenomenon. Although laymen (as opposed to the "feminologist" academicians who study the late-twentieth century as an historical curiosity) profess to disbelieve that feminism ever existed, the amount of time they spend in professing this is instructive. The force carried by the very idea of feminism is illustrated in Thomas Chornyak's traumatic memory of the first time his father told him about "the abberation of feminism" as the sort of unpleasant fact of life with which all fathers must burden their sons. Feminism is a cultural bogeyman, and even the most unsuperstitious males of Elgin's America seem to harbour a secret collective fear that there is, somewhere, a feminist under the bed.

11.Elgin's texts ironically illustrate the well-known linguistic principle of "gender marking," the tendency of language to treat the feminine as specialized and differentiated from the masculine or general form ("poet" and "poetess"; "dog" and "bitch"). Thus the quarters where the men live are called the Households, while the quarters where the women live are called "Womanhouses."

12.Elgin maintains in "A Reply," that she chose to explore her ideas about language in fictional rather than scholarly form because academic writing was inaccessible and limited, debarring her from the very audience she wanted to reach. She further suggests that scholars are over-specialized and (between disciplines) anti-collaborative, and thus are continually re-inventing the wheel (178, 181).

Chapter V
Representing Resistance

"Resistance is the secret of joy."

Alice Walker

"Resistance is futile."

Advertising Slogan, Häagen-Dazs Ice Cream

Like the linguistically reconstituted body of Native Tongue and The Judas Rose, resistance in the dystopian narrative is not elucidated but adumbrated. Resistance occupies, in these texts, a shadowy, shifting, interstitial space somewhere between the possible and the impossible, between now and never. Resistance stakes out a ground that is, like the image of the perforated, pitted landscape with which I began my first chapter, riddled, abysmal, and profound.

This adumbrated representation of resistance accounts for the transformational tensions implicit in dystopian narrative's progression from "our" present to the projected textual future. As Jean Pfaelzer observes in "What Happened to History?", the traditional utopian narrative is a "social and political parable" in which "internal literary structures" establish "a normative statement about historical process"

(191). Historical process, however, is often elliptically avoided in these texts, a visible exclusion that calls attention to itself, like Alldera's absence in Walk to the End of the World, through its invisibility. Pfaelzer begins her article by citing Edward Bellamy's 1888 utopia Looking Backward, in which the protagonist Julian West reads a novel from the far-future "twentieth century." Noting the absence from this text of all the essential fictional elements of his time, of "all effects drawn from the contrasts of wealth and poverty, education and ignorance, coarseness and refinement, high and low," West is most impressed "not so much [with] what was in the book as [with] what was left out of it" (Bellamy 123; qtd. in Pfaelzer 191).

One of the most provocative of the textual exclusions in feminist utopian writing is not, to my mind, the absence of the social ills and estrangements observed by Julian West in his imaginary future novel, but the lack of depiction of the modulation from the flawed present to the utopian future. What the feminist utopian text commonly excludes, or at least elides, is the point and process of transition, the route for getting "there" from "here." Some critics, such as Susan Janice Anderson, see this sketchiness as a function of poor or lazy writing; in her introduction to the science-fiction anthology Aurora: Beyond Equality, she lampoons stories in which "endless pages of dull lecturing" are introduced by "plot devices as flimsy as: 'You mean you've been in suspended animation for the past five hundred years? Well, let me briefly fill you in on the feminist take-over'" (12). Even in texts that deal with fully-realized and complex societies, however, texts, in other words, that do not suffer from the symptoms of lazy writing, the portrayal of transition is minimal.

The consistency with which this is true suggests that the very vagueness of the relationship of the fictive future to its fictive past is worth careful consideration. Ruth Levitas believes, and I agree, that both in the act of presenting an alternative future and in the meagreness of the representations of transition, contemporary utopian writing "reflects a belief in the radical indeterminacy of the future" (261). As Ursula K. Le Guin remarks in her introduction to The Left Hand of Darkness, "the future, in fiction, is a metaphor" ([vi]). This metaphor is increasingly complicated if we consider that each imagined alternative future implies its own imagined (and imaged) alternative past. As in Burdekin's Swastika Night, the lines of history and prophecy become fruitfully confused. Swastika Night's far-future Hitlerian Empire depends on a fictional history that diverges from our own "real" history, yet that follows, crosses, and re-crosses our own at significant historical junctures. "Behind the alternate [sic] history," as Mark Rose asserts, lies "the Pascalian vertigo, the dizzying vision of the infinite possibilities of times that might have been" (119).

The process of the transition from "here" to "there" is problematically represented in dystopian as well as in utopian texts. The realism or "believability" of the transition has been a focus of much conversation with friends who share similar generic interests. I have consistently, if informally, found that male readers admire, for example, The Handmaid's Tale, but express reservations about its unrealistic, unconvincing, or insufficiently detailed textual transition from contemporary North America to the future Republic of Gilead. Female readers, on the other hand, have confessed that not only do they find the portrayal convincing, but that, since reading the novel (in which the overnight coup of the extreme religious right is accomplished first by freezing all bank accounts belonging to women), they seldom use an Automated Teller machine without a quiver of unease.

The feminist dystopian text delineates an eternal dystopian moment that spreads backward in time and forward in time along a line drawn by the single constant of oppression. The dystopian moment is an enduring moment, and resistance can exist only in its gaps. If there is a common definition of resistance in these texts, it might be that resistance begins and ends at the point of disrupting, or attempting to disrupt, that static moment. The act of resistance is therefore, in one sense, divorced from or distinct from its outcome. It is the process of resistance, as much as its result, that is important.

The dystopian time-line has been reconstituted, in feminist dystopian narrative, as an eternal one, leading neither to a teleological consummation of history, as in the traditional utopian plot, nor to an apocalyptic collapse of history, as in the future holocaust plot. Instead, the eschatology of the feminist dystopia suggests the conflation of past and future into a single constant, mutable only in its variations, immutable in the consistency of its essential fact of oppression. Perhaps like the "real" or "true" history that has transpired since Swastika Night's original publication in 1937, the mythical or alternative history unfolded in Burdekin's novel falls into the category, like Offred's contradictory stories in The Handmaid's Tale that "can't all be true," of true lies (100). Burdekin's vision of the future is, in many respects, so easily and so eerily interchangeable with the true lies of later twentieth-century dystopian narratives because, I suspect, of the ahistoricizing property of dystopia. If, as Frances Bartkowski observes, "the utopian strategy aims to insert a future--a what-might-be" into a "known or imagined past or present" (130), then the dystopian strategy closes off the proliferating possibilities of an unfolding future by drawing past and future together into a knot of inevitability. But, perhaps because I am reluctant to entirely abandon hope, and I find myself at this point in my project very reluctant indeed to do so, I see the act of drawing the dystopian time-line as itself an act of resistance. Driven by a sense of damnation and despair, it is an endeavour somehow neither damning nor despairing. As Ursula K. Le Guin notes in Always Coming Home, a text is an act--of communication, of mediation (538). Like any act of resistance, it is at once hopeless and necessary.

The texts that I have chosen to examine share a common conviction in their paradoxical assertion that even if nothing can be done, something must be done. And, again paradoxically, it is when an oppositional praxis appears least possible, when oppression appears most completely annihilating, that resistance arises. As Nadia Khouri notes of the dialogic relationship between utopian and dystopian culture in Marge Piercy's Woman on the Edge of Time, it is where every possibility for action has been eliminated, "where the hegemony of multiple powers seems to lead to nothing but utter submission, that the contact with a utopian world is by necessity established" (56-57). Piercy's plot is constructed, Khouri observes, according to

> an action-reaction dialectic in which every obstacle is conjured up with a double intentionality: that of heightening the paralysing nature of hegemonic power, and that of provoking strategies whereby the system of power destroys itself by its own contradictions. (57)

This is equally true of the dystopian texts under consideration here: resistance may not succeed, may fail nobly or ignobly, or may, as in Burdekin's Swastika Night, never exist at all in the form the reader hopes to find it. And yet, the preconditions for its existence, even if only its latent existence, are the same conditions which compromise the hegemonic power engendering these conditions, the power which "beget[s] its own dysfunctions" (Khouri 57).

Let us not forget, either, that, in the end, these texts do get written, and their stories do get told--even if they are stories of failure and defeat. The narrative of defeat is, after all, not an unimportant document. Alldera moves, in Charnas's Walk to the End of the World, from silence through speech to silence again, her final silence that of the distant figure disappearing over the horizon, into no kind of survival we can recognize. Her climactic rejection of the survival of the race, her "no" (which becomes as powerful a word as the forbidden pronoun "I") can be read as nihilistic; on the other hand, it can also be read as a credo of strength so great that it insists on an individual definition as to the kind and nature of survival. Like the narrator in Joanna Russ's enigmatic novella We Who Are About To, Alldera refuses individual survival when it comes at the cost of individual oppression, and abdicates responsibility for the survival of the race as a whole with which patriarchy burdens and controls women. Rejecting the complicity of the Matris who demand the continuance of the race even at the cost of the enslavement of half its membership, Alldera's most powerful act of resistance is to refuse to survive in such conditions; she overcomes the instinctive will to survive that governs her in her role as an abused fem, and demands the right to decline survival if she so chooses.

In Swastika Night, this right, like every other, has been taken out of the hands of the debased breeding stock that women have become. And yet, even in Swastika Night, Ethel is ultimately represented, if only through her virtual absence, in the tremendously visible hole where her presence ought to be. Ethel does, moreover, bear the daughter whose existence projects the text beyond its ending; such a rupture of the hermetic text parallels the rupture performed by even a resistance as invisible or as latent as that which we find in Swastika Night. Burdekin's dystopia is, in many ways, one of the most disturbing of these novels, in that we look so unavailingly for defiance among the fenced-in enclosures of the women's quarters, inside of which the women sit in torpid complacency, with nothing at all, let alone the fire of revolution, smouldering behind their eyes. This very lack of resistance radically engenders another kind of resistance, a resistance that begins to grow in the mind of the thwarted reader. Even in the novel's "present," however, as opposed to its projected "future," the story of Ethel's devolution is a story needing as urgently to be told as those of other silent people in our own real and imagined histories, as any of the stories of those who live, in Offred's words, "in the gaps between the stories" (53).

Peter Fitting has urged repeatedly, in his prolific writing on the subject, that the failure of utopia is symptomatic of a larger cultural failure, and that in succumbing to the dystopian impulse, we have replaced the potency of the utopian vision with the enervated and attenuated dystopian. But the movement from utopia to dystopia is not so simple as that. If, as Fitting argues in "For Men Only," we must not take the literary utopia as a blueprint for the future, then neither must we so read the literary dystopia. For, just as utopia radically appropriates no-place in order to generate a fruitful ideological tension between "there" and "here," dystopia radically seizes the terrain of an imaginary anyplace/everyplace. In superimposing the dystopian template over our own cultural terrain, feminist dystopia shows just how well the two landscapes align. Each of the novels I have examined here leaves one phrase ringing in my mind upon closing its covers: I find myself repeating, epigrammatically if not epic-ly, "Why, this is dystopia, nor are we out of it."

Finally, what is such an act of alignment if not itself an act of resistance? The dystopian text draws a time-line that penetrates the real and the unreal; it draws a map that fits, "semelessly," over our own. Its landscape, battered and bleeding, is ours. But its function is admonition and not prophecy. Donna Haraway may claim, with some justice, that "the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" ("Manifesto" 191) but, in fact, the world of the text, in which resistance is negated, is nevertheless not yet wholly our own. For all that the dystopian moment is, for women, here and now, such a world may still be averted. It may even be averted, ironically, by the very act of stating that the dystopian moment is, for women, here and now. Like the task of the "oppositional utopian text," as Tom Moylan observes, the task of the dystopian text may be "not to foreclose the agenda for the future in terms of a homogenous revolutionary plan but rather to hold open the act of negating the present" (26-27).

The telling of the dystopian tale can, in this sense, be an act of faith as well as of despair. In presupposing a listener, the story creates of the reader a receptacle (one who receives and contains), a receptor (one who receives stimuli), and a receiver (one who holds in trust). The closure of the feminist dystopia is thus, finally, opened up. In creating an alternative past and an alternative future, the dystopia opens up the present for investigation. Both writing beyond the ending and rewriting the beginning are, as Rachel Blau DuPlessis observes, "acts of authority" which open up imaginative possibilities extending backwards and forwards in time ("Apologues" 2). In sending such a message, or even in the act of faith required in sending any message (think of Offred speaking into the void, her creed the affirmation of the listener she must invent), the feminist dystopia generates endlessly proliferating possible futures. The reader is invited, as receiver of the dystopian message, to join in the resistance; the text itself is her initiation. The future beyond the text is thus ruptured with and by the possibility of change. Ursula K. Le Guin has frequently called science fiction a mode of writing that is a "thought experiment." And so it is. But, as in the paradigmatically unrealizable physics experiment known as "Schrodinger's Cat," the dystopian experiment is an experiment in indeterminacy. In the imaginary physics experiment, the results will inevitably change as the experiment is observed, because the fact of observation influences and alters its outcome: the box in which the cat is enclosed with decaying atoms must be opened in order to determine if the cat is alive or dead, but opening the box defeats the moment of pure indeterminacy in which the cat is theoretically at once, because the atoms may or may not have decayed, may or may not have released the vial of poison gas, alive and dead. The act of observation is an act of powerful potential.

The feminist dystopian narrative opens up the same kinds of possibilities. It, too, operates on a principle of uncertainty. The texts I have explored here, in particular, are informed by and committed to indeterminacy. In thinking about the endings of these texts we see that uncertainty at work: Offred's tale, for example, may in fact be an elaborate academic hoax, or a narrative so reconstructed by its redactors that it is unrecognizable. At her last appearance, Offred is vanishing "into the darkness . . . or else the light" (277), and the cynically pessimistic undertone of the Historical Notes challenges our eagerness to see her destination as the latter. Alldera disappears over a ruined horizon into the myth of utopia; she leaves behind her the thousands of still-enslaved fems upon whose backs the Holdfast is built. In Swastika Night, Alfred dies never having become the conquering hero that his namesake was; he leaves as his only legacy an old book and a new daughter, and the hope that between the two the world might somehow be redeemed; the final ellipses of his dying words trail off into an undetermined and indeterminate textual space. The Gate to Women's Country strands us somewhere between utopia and dystopia, in a mythological purgatory where women are, on multiplicitous levels of metaphor, damned if they do resist and damned if they don't. In The Female Man, the conflict between Jael, embodiment of the dystopian, and Janet, embodiment of the utopian, is the kind of struggle that cannot be untangled, since the mutually exclusive stories they tell are concoctions of lie, truth, and myth that cannot be separated but that cannot both be true. In Native Tongue and The Judas Rose, Suzette Haden Elgin suspends the possibility of reform, adumbrated like the adumbrated body, in the same way that, as readers, we are asked to suspend our disbelief.

This uncertainty can be, however, at once freeing and fertile. By creating a dystopian constant that moves inexorably beyond the boundaries of the text, the dystopia involves the reader in a position of incumbency; the world may not be changed, but the reader might be. The burden of responsibility is placed upon the reader, and a new realm of possible action is opened up beyond the contested borders of the text. As an experiment in indeterminacy, therefore, the feminist dystopia alters where it alteration finds. It expresses and extends a resistance that is disallowed within the fictional boundaries of the narrative outside and beyond those boundaries. If the problem of resistance is that there is, within the dystopian economy, neither space nor time for it, then the paradox of resistance is that it exists nonetheless.

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